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WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY ZONA GALE

NEW YORK :: B. W. HUEBSCH :: MCMXVIII

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# INTRODUCTION

The Wisconsin Plays are written by Middle-West men and women and produced by the Wisconsin Players.

The Wisconsin Players, a group of non-professional actors under the direction of Mrs. Laura Sherry, are now in their seventh season. When they are at home, they occupy a charming old English basement house downtown in Milwaukee, called the Playhouse, with four floors for activities. In the basement is the Playhouse tea room, decorated in the new manner by artists among the members of the organisation. On the main floor is the workshop theatre, and here, in addition to the plays done by the members of the society, have been played translations from the French, German, Russian, Italian, Swedish and Norwegian, with English, Irish and Scottish plays. Not only are the plays produced by members of the society, but the stage settings, costumes and posters are designed and executed by the members. Here,

950879

every month comes some one from outside to lecture on the present moment in drama, poetry, prose, music or the pictorial arts. On the second floor is the Playhouse reading room, a large room with an open fire. On the third floor is the ballroom. Weekly dancing classes assemble for instruction in technic and direction in naturalistic work, and the hall is always open for rehearsal and practice.

In order not to neglect the possibilities of the larger theatre, the society makes occasional productions in one of the Milwaukee theatres. The last production was "A Midsummer Night's Dream," given with new interpretation of colour and lighting and dancing, with ballets which were a part of the Dream, and interrupted nothing. Another of the notable large productions was "The Marriage of Sobeide," a Persian play translated from the German by one of the members, and produced with accessories of lighting and hanging, and a cyclorama, but with almost no properties. The best plays both from the workshop and the larger theatre are taken on tour to other cities.

The players reach out into the municipality and the state, offering a place where the precious talent wasted in most communities may at least

have a chance of expression and hearing. The membership is open to all interested in the experiment, either as artists or as members of the audience.

In fine, the Wisconsin Players are working simply and naturally with local material. Burlesque, the insincere, they are trying to eliminate. Their hope is to express the character, the quality of their people and their people's work—not to force them and their work to established methods. Mr. Hiram Kelly Moderwell wrote of them in the *Boston Transcript*, on their recent New York engagement at the Neighborhood Playhouse, that "this particular band of seekers has discovered and developed a really fresh and original talent among its writers, for the observation and transcription of the characteristics of the Middle Western life. More, by giving the freest rein to these writers, it has encouraged them to work with such freedom that they have achieved a dramatic style quite their own." They have wanted to accomplish in some measure that which Mr. Rudolph Block in the *New York Tribune* said that they had accomplished: "Acting sufficiently unprofessional to achieve the illusion of life which the sharp edges of the trained actor are successful in keeping at arm's length."

All these hopes are still formulating among the Players, and no one knows better than they how much is to be accomplished.

ZONA GALE.

March, 1918.

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# THE FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS

By S. Marshall Ilsley

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

CORNELIA MILK, ELECTA MILK, } two maiden ladies who have seen better days. They are living in Millet, Wis.

MRS. OBERLY, the blacksmith's wife

JENNIE, her daughter

MRS. OMAN, formerly of Millet. She married and went to live in the city

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

# THE FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS

TIME: *A winter afternoon of a recent year.*

SCENE: *A little old fashioned parlour, neat and comfortable but showing age. There are a few pieces of old mahogany but most of the furniture is plain and inexpensive. There is a small case of old books. A door to the right leads to the street. Another door to the left and back leads to the kitchen.*

CORNELIA, *a maiden lady past forty, simply dressed, is sitting by the table putting fresh lace on a black silk waist.* ELECTA, *her sister, a year or two younger, is in a rocking chair darning stockings.* MRS. OBERLY, *the blacksmith's wife, is on the sofa. She is a heavy, middle aged woman and wears a shawl and hat.*

MRS. OBERLY

[*Rising heavily.*] Well, I must be going home along.

CORNELIA

[*Her needle flying.*] Don't hurry, Mrs. Oberly, do sit awhile.

ELECTA

Sister and I don't get out much in winter.

MRS. OBERLY

I just stopped in to say good-bye.

CORNELIA

Oh . . . we forgot to tell you . . .

ELECTA

We've about decided not to go.

MRS. OBERLY

[*Surprised.*] Not going? Do tell!

CORNELIA

You see, it's so soon after Christmas.

MRS. OBERLY

[*Sitting again.*] For land's sake, I thought it was all settled!

ELECTA

Not settled, we are never sure beforehand.

CORNELIA

You never can tell what may happen.

MRS. OBERLY

After those grand invitations, and the weather so mild . . .

CORNELIA

Yes, we never shall see another bishop consecrated.

ELECTA

We have seen four come and go in this diocese.

CORNELIA

But this man's young, and he'll outlast us.

MRS. OBERLY

Well, well, I am surprised, such great church ladies as you be! I says to John, I says, there wouldn't be no 'Piscopal church here if 'twarn't for them Milk sisters.

CORNELIA

Now, Mrs. Oberly . . .

MRS. OBERLY

True as I'm sittin' here, all Millet knows it. I warn't born 'Piscopal, but seein' as it's the only

church here I'll do my share, and when it comes to finding delicate ladies like you be, down on your hands and knees scrubbin' the church floor, I says, you'd a better call on Joan Oberly first; scrubbin' is more in my line.

CORNELIA

Sister, do you hear her?

ELECTA

But you don't understand, Mrs. Oberly, we wanted to do it. It was only the altar steps.

CORNELIA

There is so little we can do.

MRS. OBERLY

Little! Fixin' that tree for the Sunday School all by yourselves, and climbin' on that rickety church ladder! I'm thankful neither of you broke your hip.

ELECTA

Don't suggest it: as if every time sister gets up on a chair . . .

CORNELIA

It's you who will climb on chairs to reach down the jelly.

MRS. OBERLY

Excuse me, but I says to John, I says, if ever there was saints on earth the Milk sisters are them.

ELECTA

Now, now, now . . .

CORNELIA

Not saints!

MRS. OBERLY

I'd like to know, spending all your money on those young ones, and not havin' a trip to town to see the makin' of this new bishop?

ELECTA

You ask your husband about our being saints.

CORNELIA

I guess John will tell you . . .

MRS. OBERLY

[*Rising.*] Well, I must allow, husband did say. . . . There I won't repeat home talk.

CORNELIA

Now, Mrs. Oberly!

ELECTA

Exciting our curiosity. . . .

MRS. OBERLY

Well, he did say as how he knew the Milk girls before I did. . . .

CORNELIA

Yes?

ELECTA

Well, what else did he say?

MRS. OBERLY

It's time for me to be goin' home along.

ELECTA

Goodness, if I don't smell that sponge-cake! [*She rises and hurries out.*

MRS. OBERLY

I was goin' to remark, if there warn't something in the oven.

CORNELIA

Just like Lecta, she always forgets her oven. If she would only leave sponge-cake alone when eggs are high. I never say anything, for with her delicate digestion if there is any one thing she craves . . .

MRS. OBERLY

Next to currant jelly there is nothing so un-

certain as sponge-cake, and a sponge-cake that don't rise . . .

CORNELIA

Oh well, the cat will eat it, with plenty of cream.

[ELECTA *returns.*

ELECTA

Burnt to a crisp!

CORNELIA

The full rule?

ELECTA

A dozen eggs. Oh, if there only were a man in the house to say something!

CORNELIA

My dear, before company!

ELECTA

I mean it! Of all the . . . mm m . . . oh!

MRS. OBERLY

Just what John said, "Electa Milk had the old Nick in her when she was a girl." . . . Excuse me, I forgot!

ELECTA

Don't apologise, John knows. The other day when I went into his shop with our tongs to mend,

and overheard some . . . well pretty strong language . . .

MRS. OBERLY

He was that mortified! But, he said, when it comes to shoeing a colt . . .

ELECTA

Exactly! I told him there were times when even a lady would be glad of a man's tongue.

CORNELIA

Be careful, dear, if you say too much Mrs. Oberly will think . . .

ELECTA

Oh—that burnt cake— Excuse me I must open the kitchen window. [*She goes out.*

CORNELIA

[*Calling after her.*] Do be careful of draughts with your throat. [*To* MRS. OBERLY.] Sister is so impulsive, she is like a child. I have to watch her.

MRS. OBERLY

John and I was saying how two such lovely ladies as you be . . . how you ever missed out with the boys?

CORNELIA

[*Alarmed.*] Oh, Mrs. Oberly! Somehow we had each other . . . and father.

MRS. OBERLY

Both so lively like. . . .

CORNELIA

My sister had chances enough, she was much sought after. There was one young man in particular. . . . he wrote beautiful poetry . . .

MRS. OBERLY

He up and died on her? That kind usually does.

CORNELIA

[*Vaguely.*] No . . . no . . . you'd be surprised if I told you who it was. He's president of a bank in Lakeport now.

MRS. OBERLY

You don't mean . . . ? I believe it was Charles Oman.

CORNELIA

I mentioned no names.

MRS. OBERLY

His folks lived near here. And he off and married another girl. That's the city of it.

CORNELIA

Please never mention it, Mrs. Oberly.

MRS. OBERLY

Well, I must say, I'm thankful I hain't got to raise my children in the city. All the temptations one reads about in the paper. . . .

CORNELIA

Yes.

MRS. OBERLY

As bad for girls as boys. Ladies at their lunch parties drinking these 'ere cocktails. . . .

CORNELIA

So they say.

MRS. OBERLY

And a smoking cigarettes. . . .

CORNELIA

Dear, dear . . .

MRS. OBERLY

And playin' cards for money. I suppose you seen the Sunday paper?

CORNELIA

I haven't had time to glance at a paper since before Christmas.

MRS. OBERLY

[*Lowering her voice discreetly.*] That French lady actor coming to Lakeport. . . .

CORNELIA

[*With sudden interest.*] You don't mean Bernhardt?

MRS. OBERLY

That's just who. In plays it made me blush to read about.

CORNELIA

Aren't you mistaken, the paper said last week she was coming to Chicago?

[*She begins to turn over the papers on the table.*

MRS. OBERLY

Yes, but she was to come to Madison first, and the theatre burned, so she is goin' to Milwaukee to-morrow.

CORNELIA

Dear, dear, and we have never seen her!

MRS. OBERLY

You don't mean you'd go!

CORNELIA

No danger, we never shall have a chance.

MRS. OBERLY

I guess if you ever read the stories—"Camilly" and "Lay Toscay"—of all the . . . ! I tell you, I got rid of that supplement before Mr. Oberly or the children got a hold of the paper.

CORNELIA

Really?

MRS. OBERLY

We have temptations enough in this country without bringin' in more from a foreign land.

CORNELIA

I can't imagine what Electa did with the Sunday paper, it usually lies here until we read it.

MRS. OBERLY

Well, I wouldn't a mentioned the subject, but I thought you might like to burn that paper if your sister hadn't seen it.

[ELECTA *enters on the last. There is a meaningful silence.*

CORNELIA

[*Tensely.*] Yes, I do think it is mild for this time of year.

MRS. OBERLY

[*Casually.*] Well I must be going home along.

CORNELIA

[*Looking out of the window.*] If there isn't the mail man already. . . .

[*She picks up a shawl.*

ELECTA

Now, Corny, with your neuralgia. . . .

CORNELIA

I'd like to know if you haven't a throat. . . .

ELECTA

Now don't stop and talk, no matter if it is mild.

[CORNELIA *goes out.*

ELECTA

Sister is so impulsive, I have to watch her like a child. She looks to be stronger, but she has always been the delicate one. Like mother, so sensitive . . . the least thing. . . .

MRS. OBERLY

Well, if that's the mail man . . . [*She starts.*

ELECTA

Oh, just a minute. What was it you were saying about the Sunday paper?

MRS. OBERLY

[*Vaguely.*] Did I mention the paper? Oh yes, I guess I did say how there didn't seem to be anything in it this week.

ELECTA

Exactly. I burned ours by mistake. In case Sister asks to borrow yours, you might say yours was gone too.

MRS. OBERLY

You read it, 'bout them plays?

ELECTA

I glanced it over; I didn't exactly read it . . .

MRS. OBERLY

I guess you felt as I did.

ELECTA

[*Seeing her sister returning.*] Sh . . . we won't say any more. [CORNELIA *enters.*] Do come in again soon.

MRS. OBERLY

I feel terrible about your not goin' to the consecration, all on account of that Christmas tree for our young ones. It ain't right. [*She shows em-*

*barrassment.*] I suppose if John was to lend you a little something . . . just by way of a loan. . . .

CORNELIA

Oh, Mrs. Oberly, we couldn't think of it.

ELECTA

We have quite decided, we can't afford it.

MRS. OBERLY

Well, good afternoon.

CORNELIA

Good afternoon, Mrs. Oberly.

ELECTA

Good afternoon, Mrs. Oberly.

[CORNELIA *shows her out.* ELECTA *takes up the paper that has just come. There is a little pause after* CORNELIA *returns.*

CORNELIA

[*Pretends to take up her sewing.*] Do you realise, Electa, that to-morrow is the sixtieth anniversary of father and mother's wedding?

ELECTA

Goodness, don't remind me, the way time flies.

CORNELIA

That isn't the right spirit—our parents' diamond wedding—it is only proper we should celebrate it.

ELECTA

They never made anything of it when they were alive.

CORNELIA

All the more reason why we should do something, and besides, it is the Feast of the Holy Innocents.

ELECTA

I never heard of that before.

CORNELIA

The idea! It has always been in the Prayer Book in black and white.

ELECTA

You need not pretend you knew any more about it than I did until those invitations for the consecration came.

CORNELIA

Well now we do know about it we ought not let it pass, and to miss the consecration would be—well—almost a sin.

ELECTA

Cornelia Milk, it was you yourself decided . . .

CORNELIA

I never decide anything, I always leave it to you. But I must say, if we miss this we never shall see another, and it will be a wonderful service in the cathedral, with candles, vestments, and everything.

ELECTA

But when it come to choosing between a tree for the children or going in town to the consecration . . .

CORNELIA

We chose the tree, of course, but now that is over we can change our minds, rise to the occasion, and make a sacrifice.

ELECTA

Oh, sacrifice, I wish you would tell me one thing more we could sacrifice!

CORNELIA

I won't get a dress this year, that's all.

ELECTA

The idea, you haven't a dress fit to be seen. I

might get on without one, perhaps, I don't wear my things so hard as you do.

CORNELIA

I'll wear calico.

ELECTA

Don't be flighty. We owe it to our position to appear like ladies even if we starve.

CORNELIA

Then we'll sell another lot along the road.

ELECTA

There will be precious little left for us if we sell another lot.

CORNELIA

I don't believe in hoarding at our age, any more than Carnegie.

ELECTA

We can't sell a lot this afternoon.

CORNELIA

We'll borrow money from Mr. Oberly, and give him a mortgage.

ELECTA

Cornelia, if you keep on tempting me! [*She gets up.*] I won't hear you.

[*The telephone rings three short and two long.*

CORNELIA

Was that our ring? You had better see anyway.

ELECTA

[*At the telephone, aside.*] No it isn't for us. [*She listens, and then hangs up.*] It was Mrs. Oberly telling Mrs. Ashbridge we aren't going to the consecration of the bishop.

CORNELIA

Oh, passing the word around, is she? Explaining why, I suppose, as if that tree or their young ones . . .

ELECTA

[*Fiercely.*] If they dared to offer us help . . . I . . . I won't stand it! Oh I'm willing to go, if you are so set on it.

CORNELIA

I'm not set. You are the one to decide. I only thought there is more than one reason why we should go now. I see the annual bargain sale is advertised at Baxter and Baxter's: if we got our new dresses there most likely we should save the cost of the trip to town.

ELECTA

Perhaps, but I wouldn't dare go to one of those bargain sales. Why, only the other day I read of a woman crushed to death at one in Cleveland, or somewhere.

CORNELIA

I wouldn't be so afraid of being killed as I would of getting the wrong thing in the excitement. I never can think when I am excited, and they won't let you exchange a thing.

ELECTA

Exactly . . . much better to deal with home merchants, we always did like to bring things home, and talk them over, before we decide, that's half the fun of shopping.

CORNELIA

I leave it to you.

ELECTA

Anyway, you'd get so tired most likely it would end in pneumonia.

CORNELIA

The idea, I'm not half so liable to things as you are. The least thing gives you a cold.

ELECTA

Now, Corny, dear, you know how imprudent you are. You're just like mother, so sensitive. . . .

CORNELIA

I'm not half so sensitive as you are, if I didn't look out for you at every turn . . .

ELECTA

Very well then, we won't argue, let us settle it, we won't go.

CORNELIA

Just as you say, but when you think of the consecration, and that it is the Feast of the Holy Innocents, and father and mother's wedding anniversary, and everything else, it does seem . . .

ELECTA

We can read about them all in the papers.

CORNELIA

Yes, I thought when we got our rural delivery, and could have a daily paper almost as soon as the people in town. I thought we should feel almost as if we lived there; but I declare, the more we read about what is going on the more

tantalising it is. I sometimes wish we never saw a paper.

[*The telephone rings again, several long and short.*

ELECTA

Is that ours?

CORNELIA

I'd better see. [*Takes down receiver. Aside.*] Same old story. . . . [*Hangs up.*] Mrs. Oberly telling Mrs. Linkum now . . . how we are giving up our trip . . . such saints. . . . !

ELECTA

Saints! No, that is too much!

CORNELIA

Well then?

ELECTA

As if they could understand our position. When I think of what father was, and all the advantages he had.

CORNELIA

Precisely! If he had ever dreamed of his daughters being cooped up in a little country village all their lives. . . .

ELECTA

Don't blame poor father.

CORNELIA

I am not blaming him, I am proud of him. It wasn't every one went to Europe in those days, and learned French as he did in Paris.

ELECTA

If he hadn't put all his money into land just here!

CORNELIA

It wasn't his fault Millet didn't grow into a big city. No one could tell in those days which were going to be the large cities. I've been crazy to go to Paris all my life!

[*She finds an old encyclopedia in the book case. As she opens it various autumn leaves fall out.*

ELECTA

Paris, who wouldn't like to see Paris!

CORNELIA

[*Reading.*] "Paris. The history of Paris begins with the Commentaries of Julius Cæsar, wherein he speaks of Lutetia. Strabo calls it Lucotocia, Ptolemy Lucoticia, and the Emperor Julian Louchetia . . ." [*She sighs and stops reading.*] That doesn't suggest Paris at all.

ELECTA

I think of a gay, brilliant place.

CORNELIA

Of course . . . the opera.

ELECTA

And concerts. . . . I adore music.

CORNELIA

The beautiful palaces . . . with statues standing around. . . .

ELECTA

The galleries of paintings . . . don't you ache to see . . . to see a really famous painting?

CORNELIA

I'd like to eat out of doors at a little table with lamps in the trees.

ELECTA

And to see the people . . . hundreds of people you don't know . . . one might have an adventure. . . .

CORNELIA

And here we sit!

ELECTA

Shut in. . . .

CORNELIA

And life passing away—

ELECTA

Passed away!

[*Telephone jingles again.*

CORNELIA

You needn't listen, it will be the same old story. Every one in the village must know it by this time.

ELECTA

Let them talk. . . . I've decided to go.

CORNELIA

Sister!

ELECTA

Yes, I've thought it out. We'll borrow the money as Mrs. Oberly offered and I'll telephone in to Lizzie Oman, and see if she will let us visit her for the night. We can't afford a hotel.

CORNELIA

Electa Milk, are you willing to stay at Charles Oman's house?

ELECTA

I? You may not like to go, Cornelia.

CORNELIA

It was you he was in love with.

ELECTA

No, I always said it was you.

CORNELIA

Those poems were to you.

ELECTA

We never were sure.

CORNELIA

Well, I am sure, he never proposed to me.

ELECTA

He never proposed to me.

CORNELIA

Now, Electa, if you think you can deceive me . . .

ELECTA

Well, anyway, we can't deceive ourselves as to when it all happened. Let me think . . . it was . . .

CORNELIA

Twenty-five . . .

ELECTA

Thirty years ago.

CORNELIA

No matter, if you feel you can go to his house . . . I don't.

ELECTA

Lizzie has asked us more than once, and we have been there to lunch. [*She takes up the telephone.*] I want long distance. . . . Milwaukee. . . . Yes.

CORNELIA

Electa, long-distance is fifty cents!

ELECTA

I can't help it. . . . No, I'll hold the line. [*Aside.*] If she rings us up they'll all be on the line listening.

CORNELIA

Sister, I think you are hasty, deciding things in this off-hand way. We ought to talk it over first, and be sure.

ELECTA

Mrs. Charles Oman's residence. Yes. Is this Mrs. Oman's residence? She's out? Dear, dear! Oh, Louise, is that you? Is your mother

out? This is Miss Milk of Millet. No, not Miller. Miss Milk, M I L K, you know, what cows give. Yes. What . . . She is? Coming here? Now isn't that a coincidence! Yes . . . yes . . . yes . . . good-bye. [*Hangs up.*] Of all things, I should say it was the hand of Providence. Lizzie Oman came out to Beasely to-day to old Mrs. Park's funeral, you know the Parks are her cousins, and Louise says she is coming over here before she returns to town.

CORNELIA

Dear me, and your sponge cake burned, we haven't a thing but bread in the house.

ELECTA

I'll run right over to the store.

[*She begins to get her cloak.*

CORNELIA

I oughtn't to let you go with your throat. . . .

ELECTA

I'd like to know if I'd let you run any risks with your neuralgia.

CORNELIA

Don't get ginger snaps.

ELECTA

I'll get some of those lovely wafers in a tin box. We can't spare expense at a time like this.

CORNELIA

Now don't be impulsive, and decide in a hurry. I really ought to go with you. Look over everything Mrs. Gunn has first, there may be some new cracker they are having in the city. I wish I knew just what they have at their teas.

ELECTA

Olives, or a little cream cheese?

CORNELIA

I'll make some marmalade sandwiches. I read about them in the paper. [*The telephone jingles again. She addresses it without going to it this time.*] Oh yes, tell them we are not going, tell them we are such saints, take up a subscription for us! [*To her Sister.*] Do be careful of the steps, they are slippery, if you were to fall and break your hip.

ELECTA

[*As she goes out.*] If she has some of her own head cheese, or do you think sardines?

[*She goes out.*

CORNELIA

[*Calling after her.*] No, no, they are so old fashioned. . . . Don't hurry. . . . I didn't say hurry, I said don't hurry. . . . No matter. [*She comes forward.*] Mercy, she will be sure to fall. I never should have let her go alone. [*She picks up the paper eagerly, and scans it, then turns to the telephone.*] Mamie, I want long-distance again . . . yes, I know it is fifty cents, it's horrid of the company to have such a charge . . . I want the Milwaukee Opera House . . . yes . . . line's busy. . . . Hello, is that the Opera House? Can I have two seats, no I mean three, for Thursday evening? Yes, Camille. . . . How much? . . . Oh, have you any for $1.50? Not any $2.00 either, only $2.50 in the sixth row . . . goodness . . . wait a minute . . . yes I'll take them. . . . Miss Milk . . . no not Miller, Milk . . . not Mick, Milk, M I L K, you know what cows give. . . . No, not Crosby, cows give, didn't you ever hear of cows? Yes, Milk. . . . Can't you keep them longer than that? . . . We can't get to town before ten thirty. . . . Well, send them to Mr. Charles Oman's bank, he'll be responsible for them. . . . Be sure now. . . . [*She hangs*

*up and breathes in hard excitement. There is a knock at the door. She lets in a middle aged lady handsomely dressed. She is* MRS. OMAN.]
Lizzie Oman, of all things!

MRS. OMAN

I thought I'd surprise you. Isn't your sister here?

CORNELIA

She'll be back directly.

MRS. OMAN

I came out to old Mrs. Park's funeral.

CORNELIA

Yes, so we heard.

MRS. OMAN

You did? How in the world—

CORNELIA

We just telephoned to your house.

MRS. OMAN

To tell me that you were coming in to the consecration of the new bishop! I knew you would be sure to, such good church women as you are, it couldn't happen without you. Now

I want you to come in with me this afternoon, and stay over Sunday at least.

CORNELIA

Impossible!

MRS. OMAN

Nonsense. Toss something into a suit-case, I'll lend you anything you forget. I've a carriage to take you to the station.

CORNELIA

There is so much to see to. . . .

MRS. OMAN

Not a word. I'll run over to see Mrs. Ashbridge, and leave you to get ready. I'll be back in twenty minutes.

[ELECTA *enters, her hands full of packages, which she tries to conceal.* MRS. OMAN *kisses her.*

ELECTA

Lizzie Oman—

MRS. OMAN

It's all arranged, you are coming with me to-day.

ELECTA

To-day? Impossible! You must have tea. . . .

MRS. OMAN

[*Hurrying off.*] No time for tea. I'll be back soon. [*She makes her exit.*

ELECTA

Did you ever!

CORNELIA

Just like Lizzie, she always was a whirlwind. That's the way she married Charles Oman. If you hadn't been so deliberate. . . .

ELECTA

Cornelia Milk, it was you never could or would decide anything.

CORNELIA

I will decide now.

[*She begins to tie up her head.*

ELECTA

You're crazy, you haven't packed yet.

CORNELIA

We have got to have some money first. I'm going right over to John Oberly's. . . .

ELECTA

Get ten dollars . . . no, twenty.

CORNELIA

Of course. I put my black silk in the valise this morning in case anything happened, so I haven't much packing to do.

ELECTA

And I packed the hand bag, but I didn't say anything, for I thought you would be so disappointed in case nothing happened. There now, do be careful, don't hurry, you will be sure to slip, you are so impulsive.

[CORNELIA *hurries off.*

ELECTA

[*At the telephone.*] Mamie, I wish you would hurry please and give me long-distance, Milwaukee. . . . I want the Opera House. . . . No, I will hold the line. . . . Is this the Opera House? . . . Well, I want three of your best seats for tomorrow afternoon for Bernhardt. . . . Yes, "La Tosca." . . . What, only box seats for three dollars? Well, yes, all right, three. . . . For Miss Milk, of Millet. What? Do I want them sent to Oman's bank? What made you think of that?

. . . You can't keep them? Very well, but don't let him pay for them, charge them to me. Yes, plain Milk, you know—milk, cream, butter, eggs, . . . what cows give. Now don't fail to send the best you have left.

[*She leaves the telephone, and hurries to gather up her packages.*

[CORNELIA *enters with* JENNIE OBERLY, *a fresh-faced girl of twelve.*

CORNELIA

Here's Jennie to see about everything while we are gone. John will bring the money over before we go.

[*While they are talking* CORNELIA *brings in an old-fashioned valise and is busy packing things she has brought in from the bed room.*

ELECTA

Now, Jennie, you know how to run the base burner?

JENNIE

Yes'm, it's like ours.

CORNELIA

And you must feed Petkins.

JENNIE

Oh, yes'm.

ELECTA

But don't you give him meat.

[*She gets her hand bag and begins to pack also.*

CORNELIA

He'd be happier to stay right here at night.

ELECTA

You must give him all the cream—he will miss us so.

CORNELIA

And, Jennie dear . . . in case . . . in case anything happens to us. . . .

ELECTA

[*Protesting.*] Sister!

CORNELIA

We must think of every contingency before going on a journey.

JENNIE

[*Cheerfully.*] If you fell and broke your hip. . . .

CORNELIA

No, I mean, in case anything happened and we didn't come back, then, you are to have Petkins.

JENNIE

Oh, Miss Corny!

ELECTA

Yes, and I trust you, Jennie, to be very kind to him.

JENNIE

Oh, Miss Lecty!

CORNELIA

And Jennie, we shall be gone over Sunday. I hope you will learn your Bible lesson just the same.

ELECTA

We'll hear you when we get back.

CORNELIA

[*Shutting the valise.*] There, that is done.

ELECTA

[*Solemnly.*] Sister, there is still time to change our minds, are you sure we are doing the right thing to go?

JENNIE

[*Aghast.*] Not go now?

ELECTA

There, Jennie, you run back to mother.

JENNIE

Mother, she says she don't blame you for changing your minds, any lady likes to change her mind; but father, he says, that last time you took back the dress to Beasely, he says. . . .

CORNELIA

Now, Jennie. . . .

JENNIE

He says, if you ladies had been married you couldn't 'a changed your minds so easy, that's what he says.

CORNELIA

Now, Jennie, it isn't good manners to talk about your elders.

ELECTA

Nor to talk about marriage to unmarried ladies.

CORNELIA

Run along now, that's a good girl, and remember to keep the stove going, and to feed the cat.

ELECTA

And learn your Bible lesson. We'll put the key under the mat.

[*They show* JENNIE *out.*

ELECTA

Now we mustn't be hasty, Corny. . . . It's for you to decide.

CORNELIA

Because I am older you want to put all the responsibility on me.

ELECTA

Quietly, quietly, there is no need of getting excited. John hasn't brought the money yet. You must remember if we sell another lot it will put their back yard and all their Monday wash right where we can see it from our front door. Of course it is a church function, something we shall want to remember for the rest of our lives but still . . .

CORNELIA

Very well, if you are afraid to go we'll give it up.

[*There is a knock at the door and* MRS. OMAN *enters.*

MRS. OMAN

Well are you all ready? Mr. Oberly met me at the gate and asked me to give you this.

[*She holds out an envelope to* CORNELIA.

ELECTA

Lizzie dear, we are not sure . . .

CORNELIA

You see Electa has a very delicate throat . . .

ELECTA

Oh, it isn't my throat half so much as sister's neuralgia.

MRS. OMAN

Not another word. Put on your hats. You may never see another consecration.

CORNELIA

Just like a man, taking vows for life.

ELECTA

As if one could ever be sure.

MRS. OMAN

There is a nice orchestral concert on Friday, you must hear that.

CORNELIA

We love music.

ELECTA

And out here there is not much music, except of course, sacred music.

CORNELIA

And graphaphones, we have heard some beautiful records.

MRS. OMAN

And Saturday afternoon there is a card party at the club.

CORNELIA

So we saw by the paper.

MRS. OMAN

Fancy your noticing what we are doing in town.

ELECTA

Why not? We get our paper almost as soon as you do in the city.

CORNELIA

We always read all the society news, it's the only way we can take part.

ELECTA

It is so interesting. I don't suppose the ladies really do play for money as they say they do.

MRS. OMAN

You wouldn't have to see them. Perhaps two or three tables of the gay set in the back room might be playing for money.

CORNELIA

Dear me, I'd like to see ladies gambling, just once . . .

ELECTA

Be careful dear, Lizzie might think . . .

CORNELIA

I would, and I'd like to try it myself to see what it felt like.

ELECTA

Sister! you are too impulsive! [*Apologizing.*] You see our lives are so quiet.

MRS. OMAN

Of course . . .

CORNELIA

Yes, and I'd like to see a lady smoking a cigarette.

MRS. OMAN

You wicked creature. I must think of some friend who indulges. I wish there was a play at

the theatre you would enjoy. If it were only last week, "The Old Homestead" was playing. You would have loved it, all about the country. And the week before, "Mrs. Wiggs" was here, such a sweet wholesome piece:

CORNELIA

[*Mildly.*] Really?

MRS. OMAN

Of course Bernhardt is coming to-morrow, in some of her awful French plays, you wouldn't care for those, I suppose?

ELECTA

I don't know . . . perhaps not . . .

CORNELIA

She is famous.

ELECTA

You didn't think of going yourself?

MRS. OMAN

Mr. Oman refused to take me. Not that we aren't old enough to stand anything, but he doesn't want daughter to go; and besides, he likes to be amused at the theatre and he hates those dreadful, sensational pieces and in a foreign tongue.

CORNELIA

I suppose men do.

ELECTA

We wondered . . .

MRS. OMAN

You don't mean you would like to see her?

CORNELIA

You see our father used to tell us a great deal about Paris.

ELECTA

He went there in 1847.

CORNELIA

When Louis Philippe was king.

ELECTA

And we have longed to go there all our lives.

CORNELIA

And we thought to see one of these plays would be something like going.

ELECTA

In a way it would be quite instructive.

CORNELIA

But of course if Mr. Oman feels so strongly about it . . .

ELECTA

As your guests we mustn't do anything . . .

MRS. OMAN

Goodness, we're old enough and I'm dying to go . . .

CORNELIA

No one need know.

ELECTA

You can't understand, but we sometimes feel as if . . . well . . . something a little spicy might liven us up a bit.

MRS. OMAN

Not another word. We'll go if I can get seats so late. I must telephone before we start for the train.

[*The sisters exchange glances.*

CORNELIA

Oh, no, not now.

ELECTA

Let us decide tomorrow.

MRS. OMAN

It may be too late then.

CORNELIA

Let us go to the consecration first.

ELECTA

Yes, that is the important thing. That is what we are really going for.

CORNELIA

Then if we feel in the mood for a little . . . well . . . diversion . . .

ELECTA

We will take our chances. We never like to decide things ahead.

CORNELIA

One never can tell what may happen.

MRS. OMAN

Just as you say, but if we are going to get the 5:20 we must be off. [*Starts to the door.*

CORNELIA

Sister listen to me, we are not going on my decision. It was you that decided. I will take no responsibility.

ELECTA

Nor I, I left it entirely to you.

MRS. OMAN

Are you coming?

CORNELIA

Then we each go of our own free will?

MRS. OMAN

Come.

CORNELIA & ELECTA

[*They speak together and go out slowly.*] Yes —we are coming.

# ON THE PIER

By Laura Sherry

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

RICHARD, a boy
JESSICA, a girl

# ON THE PIER

TIME: *The present. A Spring midnight.*

SCENE: *A pier in the river. A quivering spot of water is revealed where the moonlight touches the river. A pier is etched into the shadow. A crude board walk crosses at right angles in front of the pier. Short piles break the line at intervals on the edge of the walk. On the right is an impromptu bridge connecting the walk with the more solid ground of the bank. Near the pier is a rough bench, a board thrown across two of the piles. It is about midnight in the Spring of the year. There is a sound of the gentle lapping of waves on the pier. The pier is empty.*

JESSICA *enters over the bridge and walks out onto the pier. She remains a moment standing looking over the water, then she sits on the edge of the pier still facing the water.*

RICHARD

[*Enters from the left. He walks slowly with his head bowed. He hesitates—then hurries im-*

*pulsively out onto the pier.* JESSICA *looks up. He faces her.*] You—what are you doing here?

JESSICA

And you— [*Finishes his thought for him, imitating his melodramatic manner.*] At this time of night alone! Cut out the melodrama.

RICHARD

[*Intensely.*] I never expected to see you again.

JESSICA

[*Laughs.*] I never thought about it.

RICHARD

You remember me?

JESSICA

Of course. I couldn't forget a friend like you who had done me such a good turn. Are you still in that office?

RICHARD

No.

JESSICA

It's queer isn't it that we should meet again—

RICHARD

And here—

JESSICA

You were a good pal that day, all right, to me—a stranger.

RICHARD

Someway you didn't seem like a stranger to me. It felt like I had known you always.

JESSICA

I trusted you too right away instead of your employer.

RICHARD

That man is a beast.

JESSICA

I came from the country in answer to his advertisement. I was so hopeful. It all seemed so easy.

RICHARD

Yes—that's what he does, advertises in the country papers. He figures that country girls are easier than city girls. How have things gone with you? What has happened since I saw you? Did you get a job?

JESSICA

Which question will I answer first?

RICHARD

[*Suddenly apprehensive.*] Why are you here?

JESSICA

[*Nervously.*] Why are you here?

RICHARD

[*Bows his head despondently.*] It's no use. I've tried to keep square with myself. I tell you it's no use.

JESSICA

[*Stimulated by an interest outside herself.*] Come, things can't be so bad as that, they never are.

RICHARD

They are worse.

JESSICA

Why you are nothing but a kid.

RICHARD

[*Walks away from her.*] I'm a failure. I'm not good for anything.

JESSICA

Oh rot! You have your whole life ahead of you. You're nothing but a kid. You're too young to be discouraged.

RICHARD

I can't help it.

JESSICA

[*Follows him to the walk in front of the pier. He has seated himself on one of the piles. She sits on the edge of the pier.*] What happened? Don't you like your job? Doesn't your employer treat you well?

RICHARD

After you left the office that day—

JESSICA

Yes—

RICHARD

Well—the manager fired me for putting you on.

JESSICA

[*Despondently.*] Oh—I'm sorry. I seem to be a regular hoodoo.

RICHARD

It wasn't your fault. I was going to chuck it anyway.

JESSICA

Haven't you been able to get anything else to do?

RICHARD

That was my first job. He didn't give me a recommendation of course.

JESSICA

So you had to start all over again?

RICHARD

Yes, but I've had several chances since.

JESSICA

Then it isn't so bad is it?

RICHARD

One was in the office of a politician. He wasn't honest either.

JESSICA

And so you quit him too, silly kid. You can't make over the world in a day.

RICHARD

I couldn't stand it. It was—it was rotten.

JESSICA

But surely there are plenty of honest people to work for.

RICHARD

Oh yes, I got other jobs, but I didn't make good in them.

JESSICA

Why not?

RICHARD

I wasn't trained for them.

JESSICA

Well, you just have to keep looking until you find something you are fitted for.

RICHARD

I've looked and looked—God how I've looked! I've worn out my shoes looking, but I haven't found anything.

JESSICA

Is your home in New York?

RICHARD

Yes.

JESSICA

You are lucky to have a home and some one to look after you while you are hunting a job. Can't your father help you?

RICHARD

No. Mother has taken care of me ever since I was born. . . . I never had a father—damn him.

JESSICA

Oh—

RICHARD

[*Is silent an instant—then.*] Mother went two weeks ago. I guess she worried herself out.

[*Sits on one of the piles.*

JESSICA

Oh—how cruel.

RICHARD

But she never minded my leaving the jobs, or not making good. She always understood.

JESSICA

Of course—

RICHARD

[*Sighs heavily.*] It's been terrible without her—

JESSICA

She always understood—

RICHARD

I—I tried to dig in a ditch. I boasted to my employer when I left him that I was going to dig in a ditch. I told him it wasn't such dirty work.

[*He rises and tries to straighten up.*

JESSICA

[*Laughs.*] You dig in a ditch!

RICHARD

It wasn't funny. I couldn't do it. I wasn't any good, I didn't have the strength and the boss after swearing at me all day—told me to get out and not come back.

JESSICA

That was hard luck.

RICHARD

[*Staggers.*] It was to-day that I worked in a ditch and—I'm all in—

JESSICA

Poor kid, have you had your supper?

RICHARD

[*Sits on pile.*] No—I—

JESSICA

Your mother always got the supper—

RICHARD

I—I can't sit here—I guess I'll have to lie down a minute.

JESSICA

[*She helps him to lie on the walk.*] Let me help you—there, you'll be all right soon.

[*She sits on the pile.*

RICHARD

Tell me—tell me why are you here?

JESSICA

I've learned a good many things since that experience in your manager's office.

RICHARD

I suppose it's been pretty bad sometimes.

JESSICA

Pretty bad.

RICHARD

Of course you tried again.

JESSICA

Again and again, New York seems full of girls who just got in ahead of me. And then in some of the offices the men were like your employer. I grew discouraged. I began to suspect everybody. The people in the city are so different from the ones I've known in the country.

RICHARD

It must have been hard.

JESSICA

Yes— and I wasn't so sure of myself either. Some way I didn't feel so sure as I did when I left home.

RICHARD

What have you been doing?

JESSICA

I've been running away from everything. I ran from your manager and other men. [*She rises and walks away from him.*] I was a weak coward. I wouldn't face anything. At last I became a housemaid.

RICHARD

A housemaid!

JESSICA

Yes—rather a come down wasn't it when I was so ambitious? I couldn't stand the loneliness so I ran to this pier. You don't know how dreadful it is sitting in a skylight bedroom four flights up or in a basement kitchen with not even a window that looks out on anything.

RICHARD

It's hard for a girl.

JESSICA

Oh—no harder for a girl than a boy but—

RICHARD

Girls are weaker than boys.

JESSICA

[*Turns and sits on edge of pier.*] No we're not. I'm just as strong as you are.

RICHARD

Somebody ought to take care of you and love you decently.

JESSICA

I can take care of myself and get along without love better than you can.

RICHARD

What are you here for? What are you going to do?

JESSICA

I was trying to make up my mind to jump in—but then so were you.

RICHARD

[*Sits up in horror.*] You—why you are too beautiful. There is everything in the world for you to live for. I won't let you do it.

JESSICA

[*Laughing.*] After you are drowned, how can you prevent me?

RICHARD

I'll stay here and prevent you. I'm not going to do what I said. I hadn't fully made up my mind anyway.

JESSICA

Oh, you are just here to try to—

RICHARD

For the same reason you are, to try to make myself do it.

JESSICA

Then we're quits. There's no difference between us.

RICHARD

I'm stronger than you are.

JESSICA

You were running away too.

RICHARD

I've changed my mind.

JESSICA

That's like a woman.

RICHARD

I don't care.

JESSICA

[*Laughs.*] Why should you?

RICHARD

I'm not going to run away now.

JESSICA

Neither am I—I'm going back with you.

[*She crosses over to him and slips her arm around him to help him up.*

RICHARD

Will you marry me?

JESSICA

What for?

RICHARD

Because I love you.

JESSICA

That's what they all told me, the first thing,

just like you. But they didn't ask me to marry them. Gee it sounds country.

RICHARD

But I love you and want to do the right thing.

JESSICA

Oh, that's all right. It doesn't make any difference, really. Perhaps we'll be friends and we may be able to help each other.

RICHARD

I don't understand—

JESSICA

Neither do I—

RICHARD

My mother—

JESSICA

Never mind your mother. I can't help liking you. Maybe it's because you are weak, maybe it's because . . . Have you any money?

RICHARD

[*Immediately wilts.*] No—I haven't a cent.

JESSICA

Well I have. I've been saving my wages for

weeks. No one to do things with so what was the use of spending money. Just wait a minute. [*She draws from her pocket a small roll of bills.*] My wages!

RICHARD

Gee—I haven't seen so much money as that—

JESSICA

It makes you feel sort of weak doesn't it. Well it will buy food. Come along.

[*As they start he staggers again.*

RICHARD

No—I can't go any further. I guess I'm going to faint.

JESSICA

Here, sit here. [*She helps him to the rough bench on the right.*] Say, you need something to eat. You're weak from work and hunger.

RICHARD

Oh, I don't think I can go back—I don't feel equal to anything.

JESSICA

You'll be all right. You must be. What's the use of giving in so easy?

RICHARD

You talk that way now. You felt different a few minutes ago.

JESSICA

I came here to end it all—it made me think—and then you came—and it changed things—

RICHARD

Really,—how? Do you care?

JESSICA

You seem worth saving. I didn't seem worth saving.

RICHARD

You are—you are—and I am going to save you I— [*He rises in his enthusiasm but falls back weakly.*] Oh I'm no good. I can't do it.

JESSICA

Yes you can—you have—don't you see—you have saved me.

RICHARD

You—you're wonderful—but what's the use of trying—what's the use of living? You can't live in New York; they won't let you. What else is there?

JESSICA

There is everything. Look—look at the lights of the city. Isn't it magnificent? Isn't it great? I love New York.

RICHARD

It's a cruel city. It killed my mother. It will kill me—and you—and everybody decent—

JESSICA

Perhaps—but I love it—

RICHARD

It's wicked. It's hell, I tell you. I hate it. I can't go back— [*Weakly.*] —it killed my mother, it will kill me—it—

JESSICA

Lord, I've felt that way often enough, and then I've had a sort of longing for home—for Wauwauzeke, Wisconsin. It's in the Kickapoo valley, Wauwauzeke is. It's a friendly valley. . . . We might both of us run away and go to Wauwauzeke.

RICHARD

How would we ever get there? It's a long way to Wisconsin.

JESSICA

My wages—

RICHARD

Yes they look big when you haven't had a square meal for several days, but we can't live on those wages forever.

JESSICA

Nobody said we had to. You're hungry and it makes you ugly. Come, where's that strength you were boasting about? I can teach a country school if we get desperate.

[*She makes a wry face.*

RICHARD

I can clerk in a country store. Ugh!

JESSICA

There's a man out there who owns a store. He offered me a job as book-keeper before I left. But I was bound to go to the city and go on the stage and do something decorative. I thought if I once got here it would be easy enough. For they all said that I was just born for the stage.

RICHARD

They—who—

JESSICA

The people in our church.

RICHARD

Your church—

JESSICA

Yes, we always gave our shows in the church.

RICHARD

What a queer place. Say—was that storekeeper in love with—

JESSICA

[*Laughs.*] No he wasn't in love with me. He is just one of those simple people who are fool enough to love everybody.

RICHARD

It sounds good.

JESSICA

It is good—it's honest. Wauwauzeke doesn't shine and dazzle like New York, its street lamps smoke.

RICHARD

That sounds sort of dismal. When you left I suppose you were feeling pretty sorry for Wauwauzeke.

JESSICA

I was, and they've gone on living just the same, clean decent lives and contented and happy.

RICHARD

Without ever thinking they were any better than anybody else.

JESSICA

They don't know how lucky they are.

RICHARD

Let's go.

JESSICA

If we were in Wauwauzeke, we'd be in bed and sound asleep by nine o'clock and all the lights out.

RICHARD

Except the smoky street lamps.

JESSICA

It's nearly midnight now and just look at New York.

RICHARD

No signs of sleep there.

JESSICA

No it's alive, alive every minute of night and

day. That's what I like about it. I like to live in a place where people are doing things.

RICHARD

And Wauwauzeke is dead—

JESSICA

Worse than that,—it's alive, but not kicking. Most of the people don't know that they are buried alive, a few know it but haven't the strength to dig out.

RICHARD

And you dug out?

JESSICA

Yes—did you ever lie awake at night and try to imagine how it would feel to be buried alive?

RICHARD

Oh yes—horrible—

JESSICA

Well—Wauwauzeke is like that.

RICHARD

Ugh, I'd rather stay here.

JESSICA

And take a chance, so would I.

RICHARD

There must be chances in such a big city.

JESSICA

There are. We've got to get after them, that's all. We've got to take jobs we're fitted for and not try to do things we're not fitted for.

RICHARD

Like going on the stage—

JESSICA

And digging in ditches—

RICHARD

We'll make a fresh start.

JESSICA

On another tack.

RICHARD

Yes—together.

JESSICA

Together. How do you feel? Can you move along again? [*She helps him up, they start to go. She supports him.*] We'll get some supper and then you'll be all right.

RICHARD

[*With pride.*] I'll be just as strong as you are.

JESSICA

Stronger.

RICHARD

You're great!

JESSICA

Thanks. We'll go to Childs and get a square meal and then find lodgings.

RICHARD

And to-morrow—

JESSICA

We're young and strong. There's some one in that city looking for us.

RICHARD

It's lucky you've got your wages. God—if they'd let a fellow earn them honest—it's no use—I tell you it's no use—and I'd feel poor letting you spend your wages on me.

[*Sinks back onto the bench.*

JESSICA

Now don't begin that again. Some day you may have to spend yours on me.

RICHARD

I would if I could ever get any. God, if they'd let a fellow earn them honest—It's no use—nothing's no use.

JESSICA

Brace up. There's nothing to worry about. [*Lifts him to his feet with effort.*] If we don't make good, we can always go to Wauwauzeke.

RICHARD

Never. Wauwauzeke—Christ—to be alive and buried. In New York you know you're alive all right even though you suffer like hell. [*He catches the spirit of the city.*] It's great to be alive. I'll earn a living some way or they can send my corpse to Wauwauzeke.

JESSICA

Good, that sounds better. Say, isn't it swell me treating you to a supper at Childs at midnight?

RICHARD

And staking me for a night's lodging. This is living!

JESSICA

We couldn't do it in Wauwauzeke. It wouldn't be respectable. What is your name?

RICHARD

Richard.

JESSICA

Richard. My name's Jessie in Wauwauzeke, Jessica in New York.

RICHARD

Jessie's a nice name.

JESSICA

Take care, there's a loose board, don't fall, it's dark—but if we once get over this bridge we'll be all right.

[*They go off towards the city.*

# THE SHADOW

AN ARABESQUE

By Howard Mumford Jones

TO

JAMES FINCH ROYSTER

THE SHADOW
THE EMPEROR
OISILLE
ELISOR
HARLEQUIN
HELENE

# THE SHADOW

*A forest in October. The hard maples which make up the wood blend in the distance until their trunks melt into a single violet cloud. Their foliage is golden, with a mellow and evanescent glory that fills the stage like the memory of dead kings. The floor of the forest is carpeted with fallen leaves which rustle audibly if anyone walks through them; from time to time a leaf detaches itself from a branch and falls to the ground where its brethren bestir themselves to receive it with a sigh.*

*The stage itself represents a clearing in the forest. To the right and back there rises out of the decaying leaves a moss-covered stone platform that once supported an altar—probably to a woodland god, but all the gods are dead now and it does not matter. Enough of the altar remains, however, to form with an old log a weather-worn rustic seat. To the left a single large maple lifts its trunk heavenward from*

*the midst of the clearing. A faint smell of decay.*

*On the seat to the right there sits a man. That is, he is a man unless the midnight splendours of the wood, the long black shadows of the trees, and the memories and flowers of the forest have not united to form an eidolon in the semblance of humanity. Man or shadow, he is long and tall and thin, dressed entirely in black (except for his white stock) in the costume of 1830. His hair is iron-grey; his face is worn, with two deep wrinkles across the high white forehead, and two more on either side of the mouth. The eyes are large and dark and sombre, except when they light up with a sudden baffling light. In repose the face is sad, save that it wears habitually a mood of light mockery, of cynicism so profound it can afford to be gentle. Almost he seems to leer. He is leaning forward as he sits, his chin supported by one white hand, gazing ahead of him—at nothing.*

*For a long time nothing happens, so that those for whom this play is not intended believe that something has gone wrong. But in the meantime the action has commenced. Bit by bit*

*the voluptuous silence has sunk into your heart. The odours and hints of dying beauty have begun to trouble you with their eerie sadness. The little leaves fall, very far apart, speaking slowly some secret matter as they fall. A faint breeze stirs the branches.*

*The man—or shadow—let us call him* THE SHADOW*—listens abstractedly. He sighs gently and straightens up. After a moment he turns his head curiously to the left.*

*A girl enters from behind the big tree. She is slender and pretty and thoughtful. Her name is* OISILLE. *She wears a light blue robe, and no hat. She walks slowly from behind the tree to the centre of the clearing; apparently she never sees* THE SHADOW *though he smiles and nods his head ever so slightly.* OISILLE *pauses and looks wistfully back into the forest.*

OISILLE

[*To herself.*] I wonder . . .

[THE SHADOW *shakes his head secretly.*

OISILLE

[*Half-aloud and argumentatively.*] I wonder. . . . They told me it would be wonderful, but it

would not last. That is what the old woman in the forest said, and the others, too. . . . But he is so handsome and brave!

[*She turns irresolutely and wanders over to the tree, on the trunk of which she puts her hand. There is a rustle in the leaves to the right, and* OISILLE *and* THE SHADOW *turn their heads inquiringly.*

[*From the right comes a little dumpy man in a torn, white toga that is edged with two purple stripes. It is a very poor toga, indeed, ragged and muddy in places, but it seems to afford him a vast amount of satisfaction. On his head there is a gilt crown. His face is round and rather vulgar, with little staring eyes; his hands are freckled and red, and he gesticulates awkwardly when he talks. His manner is grandiloquent and a little crazy, and yet he can be humble, too. He is at once funny and sad, though never without a certain dignity. He is* THE EMPEROR.

THE EMPEROR

[*Without offence.*] Hallo!

OISILLE

Oh!

THE EMPEROR

[*Anxiously.*] Have you seen any of my soldiers?

OISILLE

No, I do not think I have seen soldiers of any kind. Are you looking for them?

THE EMPEROR

[*Sits down on the edge of the platform, without noticing* THE SHADOW *who watches him keenly, and wipes his brow with a convenient sleeve.*] Yes. They are part of my army, you know. [*A little pompously.*] But perhaps you do not know. I am an emperor, a king. Do you know what that is?

OISILLE

[*Smiling.*] I think I do.

THE EMPEROR

[*With a vaguely explanatory gesture.*] I—I rule, you know. I sit on a throne and people bow before they talk to me. At least, they *used* to bow. But I find that an emperor is no good without soldiers, and mine are always disappearing. [*Anxiously.*] Do you suppose it is the pay?

OISILLE

How much do you pay them?

THE EMPEROR

[*Beckoning her.*] Come here. What is your name?

OISILLE

[*Approaching him.*] My name is Oisille.

THE EMPEROR

Oisille. O yes. Bend down your head, Oisille. [*In a stage whisper.*] The truth is—in the matter of pay, you know—I can't find my treasurer, either. [*Aloud, as* OISILLE *straightens up.*] It's a great secret. You are not to tell.

OISILLE

No.

THE EMPEROR

He went away about a year ago. Of course he had the money for the imperial army at the time, so you see—

THE SHADOW

[*Who has been listening with a faint, mocking smile, suddenly leans down and speaks softly in* THE EMPEROR'S *ear.*] Where are your majesty's dominions?

THE EMPEROR

[*Looking sharply at* OISILLE.] Eh? Did you say something?

OISILLE

No—your majesty.

THE EMPEROR

[*Complacently.*] That is right. Always say "your majesty," my dear. I thought you asked me where my dominions lay. The truth is that I am not at present residing in the ancestral palace. I—I prefer an open life. My castle is just now in the hands of another—temporarily, only temporarily. You understand. I am engaged in a field expedition—with the imperial troops!

THE SHADOW

[*As before.*] And what is the name of your majesty's realm?

THE EMPEROR

[*Petulantly, to* OISILLE.] I wish you would speak louder. [*He gets to his feet and speaks grandiloquently.*] My country is the land east of the sun and west of the moon, and my title is—[*vacantly*]—what is my title?

THE SHADOW

[*Softly.*] Emperor of the Seven Stars?

THE EMPEROR

[*Majestically.*] I am His Majesty the Emperor of the Seven Stars! [*Kindly.*] And now that you know who I am, don't be the least afraid of me. Tell me, Oisille, what are you doing here all alone?

OISILLE

[*Sadly turning away.*] Ah, your majesty, I am—waiting.

THE EMPEROR

Waiting? Ah yes. For a young man, no doubt.

OISILLE

[*Surprised.*] How did you know?

THE EMPEROR

[*Complacently.*] Experience, my dear, is a *great* teacher. In my experience, young women —especially young women of your beauty [*bowing fantastically*] are always waiting. For young men. In my own dominions—

[*Mysteriously.*

OISILLE

[*In a burst of confidence.*] O I do not know what to do! Elisor promised to meet me here, and—and he has not come! Elisor is [*embarrassed*] is—

[THE SHADOW *smiles his customary smile.*

THE EMPEROR

Elisor is the young man, my dear. He is delayed. By important business. As a young man I was often—similarly delayed. My wife the late empress—

OISILLE

I do not fear. He will come. But— O I do not know whether I want him to come! How shall I know? How shall I know?

[THE EMPEROR *frowns and scratches his ear sympathetically.*

OISILLE

Tell me, tell me, you are old. What is this thing called love? Last night Elisor told me he loved me. It was in the garden. [*Dreamily.*] We stood by the white wall above the ghostly sea, and I watched a sail as it floated away into the star-dust of the night. And there were lilies, and

roses in the moon. The air was heavy with the scent of the roses. And on Elisor's lips there lay a moonbeam and—and he kissed me while we stood there above the sea. [*Passionately.*] O how shall I know? How shall I know? Tell me, what is love?

[THE SHADOW *turns with evident enjoyment of the situation to* THE EMPEROR.

THE EMPEROR

[*Perplexed.*] Well, my dear, I should say that love—is—is an attraction between the sexes, or rather—not *merely* that, of course. Love is—well, my wife the late empress used to say that love was—

OISILLE

[*Eagerly.*] Yes—she must have known—she loved you.

THE EMPEROR

[*Uneasily.*] W-e-ll—at least she *said* she did. She used to say that love was—was [*in a characteristic burst*] —was a terribly uncertain thing, my dear.

[THE SHADOW *bursts into a peal of silent laughter.* OISILLE *walks away, wringing her hands.*

A MAN'S VOICE

[*Sings.*]

The long way and the white way,
And the shadows are long and broad!
Through wind and weather we ride together,
And never an inn on the road!

THE EMPEROR

[*Starting up.*] Eh—? Perhaps that is your young man, my dear. [*He bows majestically.*] Permit me. I will retire. And if I may suggest—

OISILLE

Yes?

THE EMPEROR

It is essential—in such matters—to remember that young men will be—[*after a judicious pause*] young men. I have observed, even in my castle. Their nature is—

[*He wags a finger mysteriously in* OISILLE'S *face, folds his toga over one arm and walks magnificently—left.*

[*A young man enters from the left at the back. This is* ELISOR. *Simple and straightforward. He is ruddy of face,*

*square of shoulder and strong of limb.* ELISOR *is dressed in a brown hunting costume, with a brown hat (of course there is a feather in it) on the back of his curly brown hair. He stops, stares at* THE EMPEROR, *and bursts into a hearty laugh.*

OISILLE

[*Running to him.*] Elisor!

ELISOR

Ha-ha-ha! Who in the world is that?

OISILLE

[*Hurriedly.*] I do not know, I do not know. It does not matter. O Elisor—!

[*She is in his arms—where she ought to be.*

ELISOR

[*Tenderly.*] Oisille!

[*He tilts her head back and kisses her.*

OISILLE

[*Who has been clinging to him passionately, shudders a little and breaks away with a convulsive gesture.*] No, no! . . . Do not kiss me, do not kiss me. We must not.

ELISOR

[*Confronted by the inexplicableness of girls, patiently.*] We must not—what? And why?

OISILLE

[*With her back to him, facing the stone platform.*] We must not—*I* must not. Last night—by the white wall above the sea—No, no . . .

ELISOR

[*Anxiously.*] Why? What is wrong? Don't you love me any more?

OISILLE

[*Partly turning.*] Yes—no—yes. I love you! I love you!

ELISOR

[*Going to her.*] Then everything is all right. Kiss me!—How pretty you are!

OISILLE

[*Avoiding him, passionately.*] No, no! It is not right. It should be wonderful, and now—

ELISOR

[*Hurt.*] But I do not see—

[THE SHADOW *who has been listening, sadly*

*shakes his head and sighs ruefully as one who has seen many lovers and heard the same story many times.*

OISILLE

[*Tragically, her eyes big and wide.*] You do not see . . . you do not see!

ELISOR

[*Simply.*] I love you—you love me. What is there else?

OISILLE

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Last night . . . in the white garden . . . when you kissed me, it was as if I heard clarions far away. And great battlements shone, all of rose, and there were men and women on them, going up and down. And you and I—

ELISOR

[*Breathlessly.*] Yes, yes.

OISILLE

And you and I—O Elisor! It was like an organ at twilight in the green woods. But today—

[*She stands staring.*

ELISOR

[*Simply.*] To-day—don't you love me?

OISILLE

Yes, but [*quite simply*] when you kissed me, there were no clarions.

[THE SHADOW *hides his face in his hands.*

ELISOR

[*Honestly puzzled.*] But I do not understand. What has that to do with us?

OISILLE

[*Incredulously.*] O don't you see?

ELISOR

[*Stubbornly.*] I see nothing. Either you love me, or you do not.

OISILLE

[*Kindly.*] No, Elisor, that is not it. We must—we must—what must we do?

[ELISOR *stands looking at her.*

OISILLE

We must find out what love is.

ELISOR

[*Desperately and out of patience.*] But I know what love is.

[THE SHADOW *looks up sharply.*

OISILLE

What is love?

ELISOR

Love is—it is—when you love some one as I love you, it is—O I can not say it, but I know, I know!

OISILLE

You see! we do not know. We must find out.

THE SHADOW

[*Half-rising, in terror.*] No, no, no!

OISILLE

[*Turning, puzzled.*] Did you hear some one?

ELISOR

[*Listening.*] No, I do not think so. . . . But, Oisille, I—I—

[*He gives up the struggle for expression with an odd little gesture of pain.*

OISILLE

[*Patiently.*] What is it, Elisor?

ELISOR

I do not understand all this. Last night you loved me—you kissed me by the white wall over

the sea. And to-day—[*bewildered*]—everything is different, and you will not kiss me. But truly [*naïvely*] Oisille, I truly love you—very much.

OISILLE

[*Smiles wanly.*] Listen to me, Elisor. It is true I kissed you last night and that I love you—[*Repulsing him.*] No, no!—But to-day, as you say, everything is different. That is what troubles me. To-day there is no moon. Before you kiss me again, I must know what love is, and where the sound of the clarions has gone, and why it is that to-day there came no glory across the sea. We must know what this thing is which men call love that changes so. We must ask people who are wiser than we, in order that—that we may act wisely, too.

ELISOR

[*Dolefully.*] Very well. . . . [*Stubbornly.*] But nevertheless I know. . . !

OISILLE

[*Wisely.*] No. We have seen that you could not tell me. We must find out. Let us search.

ELISOR

[*Mechanically.*] Let us search?

OISILLE

Yes, we must find out what love is. I will go to the old woman I met in the forest when I came this way. She is very old and wise and she will surely know. When she has told me, I will return. . . . And you, Elisor, you must promise to wait for me meanwhile.

ELISOR

Are you really going? [*Piteously.*] Won't you kiss me before you go?

OISILLE

[*Bravely.*] No, Elisor, it would not be right. . . . I will come back very soon. . . . But you have not promised. You will wait for me?

ELISOR

[*Dully.*] Yes. . . . I will wait for you.

[*A slight pause.*

OISILLE

Good-bye, Elisor.

ELISOR

Good-bye. [OISILLE *goes out left.*

[ELISOR *stands watching her, then sinks miserably upon the stone platform and buries*

*his face in his hands.* THE SHADOW, *who has been unobtrusively following the dialog, stoops over him and is about to place his hand on* ELISOR'S *shoulder when he thinks better of it. Is it because his touch would change the boy? At any rate he shakes his head mournfully and does not speak.* ELISOR *sits huddled there for a long time while* THE SHADOW *watches him.*

[*There is a great rustling of the leaves at the back of the stage.* THE SHADOW *looks around. A* HARLEQUIN *dances in from the back, kicking the golden leaves about him in a whorl. He stops his gyrations only upon sight of* ELISOR, *at whom he stands staring while you look at him.*

[*Surely there is no need to describe* HARLEQUIN. *In the costume he is wearing now, he has whirled through a thousand dances, and a thousand times kissed the tips of white fingers, silvered by the moon.. Long ago under his grotesque garments his heart was broken as a lute-string snaps, so that only a weary, jarring echo, like the fragrance of old wine, stirs in it now. And*

*his voice, which has sung a thousand chansons, is not so young as it was; sometimes it quavers on the high notes, and at the corners of his black mask you can see little knots of fine wrinkles about his eyes. Still he is a very good Harlequin as Harlequins go in this life, with his green and white suit, his bladder with which he strikes fantastically at the shadows, and the leaf that somehow clings in all his gyrations to his tight black cap. By and by he speaks.*

HARLEQUIN

I say!

[ELISOR *looks up slowly.*

HARLEQUIN

Who are you? And what's the matter?

[*He gives a skip or two, shaking his bladder as he does so.*

ELISOR

I am Elisor. It is Oisille—she has gone away.

HARLEQUIN

Well—what of that?

ELISOR

You don't understand. Oisille is the—I love Oisille, and she has gone away.

HARLEQUIN

[*Dismissing the matter.*] Oh. . . . Go after her then.

[*He whirls himself about the stage, and stops.*

ELISOR

Shall I? . . . No, I have promised to wait for her.

HARLEQUIN

[*Staring.*] Promise? What is a promise? I have made a thousand promises, and yet—here I am.

ELISOR

No, I will stay here. If I were to follow her she would not like it.

HARLEQUIN

Pray, what difference does that make?

ELISOR

Surely you would not want me to disobey Oisille.

HARLEQUIN

[*Playing with his bladder.*] All I say is, it's none of my business. But if my sweetheart does not let me do as I please, I very soon find someone else.

ELISOR

[*Astounded.*] Find someone else!

HARLEQUIN

Yes. Get someone else. That is what I always do. . . . There are many girls. When one proves unreasonable—try another.

ELISOR

[*Horror-stricken.*] Never, never, never!

HARLEQUIN

[*Dancing with his own shadow, cheerfully.*] Very well, then don't. But that is what *I* always do. [*He sings.*]

*Pierrot, le bon, . . .*
*Il faut qu'il s'en ira,*
*Parceque la Columbine est morte. . . .*

Ugh! I do not like that song!

ELISOR

Have you ever been in love?

HARLEQUIN

[*Laughing.*] Have I ever been in love? Well, I should think I have. About a thousand times. I am Harlequin. I am always in love.

ELISOR

[*Pondering the matter.*] Always in love? Do you mean that you love—different people?

HARLEQUIN

[*Staring.*] Well,—I—should—hope—so! [*Proudly.*] I have already kissed one hundred and thirty-two girls—not to speak of the married women!

ELISOR

But—but I thought that one fell in love with only *one* person, and that it lasted forever.

HARLEQUIN

[*Scornfully.*] Only the very young think that! [*When he sees* ELISOR's *face he stops his antics to argue the case.*] My dear fellow, I once thought as you seem to think, but I very soon became wiser. Eventually one grows tired. Then it is better to part at once, and without regret, and to look elsewhere—on both sides. Besides, what does it matter whose lips you kiss, provided they

are sweet, or whether the eyes are blue or brown, if only the face is pretty? At least, that's *my* idea! [*He whirls off again.*

ELISOR

Oh. . . . You say you are wiser now.

HARLEQUIN

[*Breathlessly.*] Of course I am wiser!

ELISOR

[*Awkwardly.*] Then I will ask you. Tell me, when you—you kiss, how does it feel?

HARLEQUIN

[*Patronizingly.*] How does it feel? Why, it feels very jolly, to be sure! Haven't you ever kissed a girl?

ELISOR

But the first time—and after that. Was it like clarions blowing, and a great organ, and a glory on the sea?

HARLEQUIN

[*Shuddering.*] The first time! Ah, why do you speak of such things! [*Bitterly.*] The first time!—I—I do not know. It was so long ago. I have forgotten.

ELISOR

But the clarions—now. Do you hear them blowing far away whenever you kiss?

HARLEQUIN

[*Vacantly.*] No—I have never heard any such instruments, [*politely*] except possibly the first time, and that, as I say, I have forgotten. I daresay some people may hear such things, though it sounds extremely foolish.

ELISOR

[*Thoughtfully.*] No clarions. . . . But—you say that in love you are very wise?

HARLEQUIN

[*Recovering his former gaiety.*] I should think so! Think of it! A hundred and thirty-two girls already. At a low estimate, that's at least a thousand, three hundred and twenty kisses, and I am still comparatively young. And that doesn't count in the married ones, either. Love? I know all there is to know on the subject.

ELISOR

[*Timidly.*] Tell me, then, what is love?

[HARLEQUIN *does not answer except by a*

*great peal of laughter, after which he darts again about the stage.*

ELISOR

[*To himself.*] A hundred and thirty-two . . . and no clarions. Oh! Oh! . . . [*Rising.*] I must tell Oisille. I am going to find Oisille. . . .

HARLEQUIN

Humph! Is she pretty?

[ELISOR *does not hear him, however, for he has rushed away to the left.*

HARLEQUIN

If she is pretty, I might myself be interested.

[*He amuses himself by scattering the leaves about.*

THE SHADOW

[*Suddenly emerging from the obscurity at the back of the platform, whither he retired when* HARLEQUIN *came in.*] Harlequin!

HARLEQUIN

[*Stopping short and wheeling to face* THE SHADOW.] Eh?

THE SHADOW

[*Quietly.*] Haven't we met before?

HARLEQUIN

[*His face turns white, his bladder falls from his nerveless hand, and he seems suddenly to shrink, so that his clothes are too large for him.*] You? . . . You? . . .

[*With a shriek he flings up both his arms and flees into the woods at the right.*

[THE SHADOW *descends from the platform and picks up* HARLEQUIN'S *bladder which he carries in his hands as he wanders uncertainly about the stage. Once he appears to follow* ELISOR *as if to call him back, but he changes his mind. By and by he returns to his seat.*

[*A woman enters slowly from the right. She is old enough to be peering wistfully into the distance where for her youth and love have vanished forever, and yet young enough not to have attained the bitter wisdom of the old.. Her hair was golden, and is now a bit untidy; it is arranged in a knot at the back of her head. Her face which was in the old days stately and superb, is drawn and a little fretful; and her hands unconsciously clasp themselves from time to time in the patient manner of those who*

*have ceased to protest. Whenever she catches herself in this posture, she hurriedly unclasps them again. She is clothed in a long, black gown, high-girdled, with a suggestion of the antique that sets off the faded splendour of her face. Her name is* HELENE.

[THE SHADOW, *as soon as he sees her, rises and bows very respectfully.*

HELENE

You? . . . what are you doing here?

THE SHADOW

I? Watching the world go by—as always.

HELENE

[*With a little, bitter laugh.*] The world? Here? [*She indicates with a gesture the unpromising woods, then sighs and speaks half to herself.*] And yet—I suppose, even here. . . . But why? [*To* THE SHADOW.] The truth is, my friend, I am not exactly pleased to see you.

THE SHADOW

[*Deprecatingly.*] O madame! You are cruel!

HELENE

It is, however, the truth. [*She walks slowly away from him, then turns.*] Surely we can be frank. . . . Wherever I go, it seems to me, there you have gone before me. You began by coming uninvited to my wedding, and you called persistently at my house ever after. And everywhere —at entertainments, at balls, at dinners, at the opera—it is you, eternally you. Moreover, you are not the most entertaining man in the world. [THE SHADOW *gestures in protest.*] Now to-day when the mood is upon me to be alone, and I come to these woods, behold here are you—the ubiquitous, the incessant, the diabolical you. O it is indelicate—positively indelicate! And—[*childishly*]—I wanted so much to be alone—and dream.

THE SHADOW

[*After a silence, half-aloud.*] To dream . . . ah, ah! . . . At our ages we can not afford to dream. . . .

HELENE

[*Almost crying.*] Now it is you who are cruel. . . . Tell me, why do you haunt me? What are you doing here? What do you want in this silent

forest that is—or should be—peopled only by shadows and the memories of old days?

THE SHADOW

[*Wearily.*] Shadows—I am myself a shadow, I think, and—you seem to remember me very well. [*He changes his tone and settles back in his seat.*] But come. We must not quarrel. . . . I have been amusing myself.

HELENE

And how?

THE SHADOW

[*Laughing.*] Ah, all our old friends come here. To-day there came that old fool who calls himself an emperor—and [*watching her closely*] Harlequin— [HELENE *winces ever so little.*] Also two young idiots who imagine themselves in love with each other. The girl is Oisille, I believe, and the boy, Elisor. I have been vastly entertained. The boy promised to wait here for her, but about ten minutes ago, he rushed off.

HELENE

And I suppose you have—Oh is there nothing with which you do not meddle?

THE SHADOW

[*Perceptibly hurt.*] But I have done nothing, Helene, absolutely nothing. I have merely looked on.

HELENE

[*Sardonically.*] I understand. In my own case that was sufficient.

THE SHADOW

[*Reproachfully.*] How can you, my friend? You know very well—

HELENE

[*Wearily.*] Yes, I know—I know too many things very well.

THE SHADOW

You shall judge for yourself. Here is the young lady now.

[OISILLE *enters from the left.* HELENE *turns.* THE SHADOW *melts into the background.*

OISILLE

Elisor! Elisor! . . . [*She stares about her.*] Where is Elisor? . . . O he is not gone!

HELENE

Elisor? And who is Elisor?

OISILLE

Elisor is—O say he is here! Say he is here!

HELENE

I have seen no one by that name.

OISILLE

[*Weeping.*] No, no . . . Do not say it . . . do not say it. O he promised, and now he is gone. Oh, oh. . . .

HELENE

[*Soothing her.*] Who is Elisor, and what did he promise, and what is it you are so troubled about?

OISILLE

[*Not heeding her.*] It is what the old woman said, and I would not believe her. . . . I said he *would* be here . . . and now he is gone!

[THE SHADOW *sighs audibly, with almost a humorous tone.*

HELENE

[*Glances quickly up at him. then turns to* OISILLE *and puts a hand on her shoulder.*] I do not understand. What is the matter?

OISILLE

The old woman in the forest. . . . Elisor was

to wait for me. . . . I asked her what love is, and she would not tell me. She only smiled strangely, and shook her head.

HELENE

[*Encouragingly.*] And when you came back—?

OISILLE

[*Shaking her head and walking away.*] No—that is not it. It is that I knew the truth all this time and would not believe it.

THE SHADOW

[*Approaching nearer and speaking softly to* HELENE.] You see! I have done nothing.

HELENE

[*Rapidly.*] It is sufficient that you were here.

[*She turns again to* OISILLE.

OISILLE

[*Staring miserably before her.*] For when she would not tell and smiled so strangely, I grew angry with her and I said—oh . . . oh! I said I did not need her wisdom, and that I knew already what love was, and that Elisor loved me. [*With a swift look at* HELENE.] That was what Elisor said, too. . . . It is strange. . . . Then she

laughed—a laugh that was stranger than her smile and when I asked her what she meant by laughing so, she bade me go back and find Elisor: she said he would not be here when I came and that I would then know what love is. But I was very proud and ran back to prove that she was wrong, and now—now. . . . Why could not Elisor have waited for me?

[*She turns away toward the tree.* THE SHADOW *resumes his old seat, smiling his peculiar smile.* HELENE *pays no attention to him.*

HELENE

Elisor is then your lover? . . . Why did you leave him?

OISILLE

I have told you. I went to find out what love is, that we might do nothing unwisely, he and I.

HELENE

You went away? Of your own accord? That was very foolish.

OISILLE

[*Turning to her, wide-eyed.*] What do you mean? He promised he would wait for me.

HELENE

Yes, I know. That is what my own lover told me once. . . . But it was nevertheless foolish—very foolish. . . .

[THE SHADOW *chuckles and becomes instantly grave as* HELENE *turns to him.*

OISILLE

But why?

HELENE

One should never leave one's lover—even for a moment.

OISILLE

How do you know?

[HELENE *is silent.*

THE SHADOW

[*Leaning forward, softly to* HELENE.] Why, my friend, do you not answer the young woman?

OISILLE

You have been in love?

HELENE

Yes. . . . [*reluctantly.*] Many times.

OISILLE

Many times?

THE SHADOW

[*Echoing the phrase like a broken bell.*] Many times. . . . he! he! he!

OISILLE

[*Looking frightened.*] But Elisor told me that he loved only me, and that he would always love me.

HELENE

Yes. Doubtless it was moonlight too. Doubtless there was a scent of roses in the air.

OISILLE

[*More and more frightened.*] How do you know? How do you know?

HELENE

[*Heedless.*] Doubtless also he told you that he had never kissed any one else—and then he kissed you. I know.

OISILLE

[*Suddenly, with a great light in her eyes, and the cry of one facing the truth.*] The old woman would not tell me, but you will know. What is this thing called love?

HELENE

[*As she speaks becomes more and more impassioned and bitter.*] My child, it is something better left alone. It is a strange delusion that seizes upon us from time to time, to the delicate sound of flutes and the scent of flowers and the hot perfumes of kisses that are forgotten by day. It is a nothing that nevertheless scars the soul. It is a great weariness masked as a great delight. [*Passionately.*] Look at me. . . . I have paid dearly with my innocence for experience. I have known men. [OISILLE *shrinks away, frightened.*] And each in his turn promised to wait for me here or at some other place, and each in his turn was either late in arriving or never came at all. Look at me! I am what love is . . . a great joy that fades in the morning to bitterness, and hunger, and regret. Oh . . . [*Turning to* THE SHADOW *and speaking fiercely*] this is what you have made of me! I came to this wood of many memories to dream that the world is other than it is, and that it was not morning—to dream of my lovers . . . Harlequin, if you must know, and this is what you have caused me to see—this! [*She indicates* OISILLE *who has sunk down on the stone platform at* THE SHADOW'S *feet.*] The same

story, the same disillusionment, and the same regret! Can you not take your presence elsewhere? Must we spend all our lives under your shadow? Must everything be corroded because you are near? Do you always rust the heart?

[HELENE *stands accusingly. By and by her arm sinks wearily to her side, her hands fold themselves together and her head falls upon her breast.* THE SHADOW *has sunk into his seat, staring at her. A long silence. Then he rouses himself, half rises, and begins to speak.*

THE SHADOW

You are unfair. I am only a . . .

[ELISOR *comes in at the left hurriedly, and stops short.*

ELISOR

Oisille!

[HELENE *turns and walks slowly to the right of the platform.* OISILLE *looks up, then springs to her feet, her back to* THE SHADOW.

OISILLE

[*As* ELISOR *advances.*] Do not come near me!

ELISOR

[*Stopping short.*] But I—I did not mean to go away. I went to find you.

[OISILLE *slowly shakes her head. Her eyes are very clear.*

THE SHADOW

[*To* HELENE.] You have said too much.

HELENE

No!

ELISOR

Oisille!

OISILLE

[*Quietly.*] Where have you been this while?

ELISOR

I—I have been looking for you. [*He catches the look in* OISILLE'S *eye.*] Truly, I have. A Harlequin came while you were gone . . .

HELENE

[*Sharply.*] Where did he go?

ELISOR

I do not know. But afterwards I saw him running away, very much frightened, and sobbing. [*To* OISILLE.] Who is that?

OISILLE

I do not know. It does not matter. Why did you go away?

ELISOR

I have told you. . . . A Harlequin came who had been in love a great number of times . . .

HELENE

Ah!

THE SHADOW

[*To* HELENE.] It was I who sent him away.

ELISOR

And he told me—what love is, and—and you were quite wrong about the clarions and the rest.

OISILLE

[*Eagerly.*] Why was I wrong?

ELISOR

The Harlequin said he had kissed a great number of girls, and he had never experienced any such happening—except, perhaps, the first time, and that he had forgotten.

HELENE

[*Going up to* OISILLE.] What clarions does he mean?

OISILLE

[*Vaguely.*] Last night . . . in the garden . . . Elisor kissed me . . .

HELENE

[*Piteously.*] Oh! [*She turns back again.*

THE SHADOW

[*Mockingly.*] At our ages—it is unwise to dream.

OISILLE

[*With her former directness.*] And you have been looking for me all this time?

ELISOR

Yes—except— [*confusedly*] that is, I met with that funny old man who calls himself an emperor, and I—I stopped to talk with him. But [*naïvely*] it was only a very little while.

OISILLE

[*Sadly.*] And you promised . . .

ELISOR

I know—I remembered just now and hurried back. . . . I am sorry.

OISILLE

Only just now? [*She murmurs this.*

ELISOR

I am sorry.

[OISILLE *is silent.*

ELISOR

[*In a desperate effort.*] Did you find her. . . . And will you kiss me now?

OISILLE

I found the old woman, but she would not tell me what I wished to know.

ELISOR

Then you won't kiss me?

OISILLE

No—not now, or ever.

ELISOR

Never?

OISILLE

No. I have learned now what love is.

ELISOR

Did the old woman tell you?

OISILLE

No.

ELISOR

Was it this woman?

OISILLE

No. You have told me what it is yourself.

ELISOR

[*Bewildered.*] But you said—you said that I could not tell you.

OISILLE

That is true. But the old woman said that you would not be waiting here when I returned and that then I would know what love is.

ELISOR

[*Eliptically.*] But I went to find you!

OISILLE

Yes. [*Quietly scornful.*] After you had stopped to talk with your emperor. You have only now come back.

[ELISOR *hangs his head.*

HELENE

[*Much moved.*] You had better forgive him and forget all that I said.

OISILLE

No, it is not that.

ELISOR

Then—then—you don't love me any more?

OISILLE

It is not that, either.

[*Silence*

ELISOR

[*A great light breaks upon him.*] I know. It is the clarions. . . . But what can I do? I heard none. And the Harlequin said the same thing. He heard none either.

[*There is a faint jingle of spears to the right.*

OISILLE

[*Simply, turning so that she faces both* HELENE *and* ELISOR. *To* HELENE.] You have told me what the others would not tell. It is because of the clarions and the glory on the sea that I am sending him away. And because I love him very much. But I will have nothing that is not high and noble and brave and because I will not have love that is only the sound of flutes and a memory in the morning, and because I would not degrade him or myself, I will send him away. [*To* ELISOR.] You do not love me. [*He makes a gesture of protest.*] No, I do not mean that.

You do not love me as you ought. I have grown very wise. I know now what love is: it is being alone. . . . You—you had better go away. . . .

[*The jangle of spears grows louder, and* THE EMPEROR *comes in at the left followed by two or three ragged and scarecrow soldiers as mad as himself.*

THE EMPEROR

[*Rushing up to* OISILLE.] My dear lady! The imperial army! I have found them—actually found them. They were wandering in the forest.

OISILLE

[*Smiles wanly, then takes refuge in* HELENE'S *arms.*

THE EMPEROR

[*Not at all nonplussed.*] And my young friend, Elisor. I am charmed. I am on my way to the royal castle east of the sun. Will you not accompany me? I shall be delighted!

ELISOR

[*Speaking slowly.*] I do not understand all this. . . . I see only that you do not love me any more. . . . However, you are wiser than I. And I broke my promise, too. . . . I will go

away, Oisille—with this gentleman [*indicating* THE EMPEROR]. Perhaps there will be a place for me—in his castle.

THE EMPEROR

[*Whispering anxiously.*] Have you any money?

ELISOR

[*Smiling and shaking his head.*] None at all.

THE EMPEROR

[*With a magnificent gesture.*] It does not matter. I will make you treasurer. In place of the deceased.

ELISOR

[*Advancing to* OISILLE.] Goodbye. Will you not kiss me this time?

OISILLE

[*Leaving* HELENE.] Yes.

[*She lifts her face; he kisses her.*

ELISOR

[*As he turns, catching sight of* THE SHADOW, *apparently for the first time.*] Who is that?

OISILLE

Where? I see no one.

ELISOR

On the platform.

OISILLE

But there has been no one there.

ELISOR

But now. Look, it is Harlequin.

OISILLE

No . . . no! It is the old woman in the forest. . . . I will not see her now, I can not see her. Good-bye! Good-bye! [*She runs out, left.*

ELISOR

That is strange. It is not an old woman, it is Harlequin. When did he come?

HELENE

He has been there all the time.

ELISOR

No, he was not there a moment ago. . . . But it is strange. She is mistaken, mistaken in this as in many other things. It is Harlequin. [*To* HELENE.] Will you not tell her [*wistfully*] that it is Harlequin? I should like her to know the truth for once.

HELENE

But it is not—

ELISOR

Ah! . . . You are wrong, too. Well, never mind. I dare say it makes no difference. . . . Good-bye, Harlequin. . . . [*To* HELENE.] And will you tell her that I—I love her very much?

THE EMPEROR

[*Bustling about.*] Come! Come! It is a long journey. The imperial palace is very magnificent. Though it is some distance away. And the army must be paid. From the imperial treasuries. Come! You will assume your position directly we arrive. If you please. [*He places himself at the head of an army of vast proportions and draws a magnificent, if visionary, sword.*] Forward!

[*The soldiers straggle after him to the right.* ELISOR *follows them. As he passes the platform* THE SHADOW *rises and stiffly gives him a military salute.* ELISOR *returns it as stiffly. They go out.*

[THE SHADOW *sinks back into his seat. Silence.*

HELENE

Why did not you prevent this?

THE SHADOW

Why did not you?

[*Silence.*

HELENE

Must it always happen this way?

THE SHADOW

Always.

HELENE

And you can not help yourself?

THE SHADOW

Ah, madame, I am only—a shadow.

[*Silence.*

[HELENE *walks thoughtfully to the left, where she turns and speaks.*

HELENE

Good-bye!

[*But* THE SHADOW *does not hear her. He has already assumed his former attitude, leaning forward with his chin supported by one white hand, gazing ahead of him —at nothing. He smiles slowly.*

[HELENE *goes out.*

[*A leaf falls. . . . A faint wind stirs the branches. . . .* THE SHADOW *sighs. . . . Very slowly, the curtain falls.*

# WE LIVE AGAIN

By Thornton Gilman

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

| | |
|---|---|
| PHILOS | MRS. ALLEN |
| DAVID | LIZZIE |
| STONE | MATTIE BLACK |
| PREACHER | MRS. ROUNDTREE |
| WARREN | ELLA DOW |
| BARNS | MRS. BARNS |

# WE LIVE AGAIN

TIME: *New Year's Eve.*

SCENE: *A Middle Western town.*

MRS. ALLEN'S *living-room is disclosed. A door, left, gives entrance to her bedroom; another upstairs; another, rear, to the kitchen; right of rear centre to the wood room; above, right, the fifth door, to the out of doors. There are windows. In one corner stands a heating stove and the dining table is in the other. A brussels lounge is against the wall. A bureau between the doors to the wood room and the kitchen, a few family pictures, a sewing machine, a sword of the Revolution, a hanging oil lamp, and a bracket lamp complete the furnishing of the room.*

*A watch meeting is in progress. Ten or a dozen chairs are arranged like pews in a church; these the* PREACHER *faces; between him and the stove is a small table on which is placed a silver communion service. At the left of the centre of*

*the room the seven people of the congregation are kneeling before the* PREACHER *as they have received communion. All of the women are bonneted except* MRS. ALLEN.

*The* PREACHER *pours from the chalice the remainder of the wine into the cruet and the wine from the cruet into the bottle; then he spreads a cloth over the service.*

PREACHER

Arise, dearly beloved, go in peace, and may the blessing of God go with you.

[*The communicants rise and return to their seats.*

PREACHER

We are coming to the new year. The times are changed. The spirit that moved among our fathers no longer guides the new and worldly generation. We, the faithful, are but a handful. Our Church is like an old gourd whose meat, having dried, rattles in the shell. Where are the people who do not fill our empty shell of a Church? The spirit has dried away leaving only the dead that rattle.

WARREN

Amen. Amen.

PREACHER

[*Becoming more violent.*] We need awakening. We need to be embued with the Holy Ghost like our fathers, who attended full of faith and zeal upon the means of salvation.

WARREN

Amen. Amen.

PREACHER

But the spirit can be recalled to live with us again. If the few here to-night can go out from this watch meeting into the new year fired with the evangelical spirit, that will make us "instant in season, out of season, to preach the word, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine," the new year will end with great addition to our number and strength of faith to every one.

[*During the last speech the town marshal comes in, and throwing back his coat waits for the end of the sermon.*

PREACHER

Welcome, Brother Stone. We are glad you can be with us at the end of our watch.

STONE

I came when I got the saloons shut up.

[*Moves along the aisle to a seat near the* PREACHER.

PREACHER

I am going to give over the next few minutes to the brethren to tell how the fire was on them of old time. Will you say a word, Brother Warren?

WARREN

[*Rises slowly and clears his throat. He is an old man who speaks in a cracked voice and with feeble flourishes.*] I remember back in York state when I was a boy going to watch meetin'. Everybody'd go fer miles around—men and their wives, young men, young women. An' children too, back there in that time, weren't too delicate and ignorant to know about religion and the way to get to Glory. Strong men weren't ashamed to testify about their knowledge of the wisdom of God. I can remember their prayers and "amens" as though 'twere yesterday. An' the last ten minutes of meditation and silent prayer everybody felt the presence of the Holy Ghost. And the hand shaking when the meetin' broke up at twelve. I tell you they weren't ashamed—strong men and

leading men—to say to one another, "Is the Lord with you, Brother?" We ain't got that now. I say 'tain't the same.

[*He sits weakly and wipes his eyes with his hand.*

MATTIE BLACK

[*Who has been nodding her approval of his words pipes shrilly.*] Amen.

PREACHER

We want to get back to the old way. [*After a silence when* MATTIE BLACK *rises suddenly.*] Sister Black, God bless you.

MATTIE BLACK

That's the way I feel. I agree with Brother Warren. When I see the worldly way people carry on now'days without no more heed than as if there weren't a God, I often wonder what the world'll come to. With people it's anything and everything before church duty, until sometimes I'm afraid I'll live to see the world get punished for their sin. [*Sits.*

PREACHER

[STONE *has risen.*] Brother Stone.

STONE

I was brought up in the fear of God and the law. People used to go to watch meeting, because they feared God, and the end of the year was a good time to think about their sins and start the new year with a clean heart and a renewal of faith. But the new generation don't do things that way. They change everything. They'll get punished for their sin. God'll smite 'em in his wrath. He'll smite 'em. [*Sits.*

BARNS

I just want to add to what the brethren 've said by saying I think the way they do.

[*A long pause.*

PREACHER

Has any one a word more?

[*Another pause.*

PREACHER

Sister Allen, have you nothing to say?

MRS. ALLEN

[*A woman of 45 who has drunk life from a bitter cup but has kept sweetness of attitude. While the others agreed with the foregoing in various unconscious and characteristic ways, her quietness gave the impression of disapproval.*] I

said nothing, for I'm not sure I'm right when I disagree with everybody.

PREACHER

If you have fallen into a wrong way of thinking, we can help you to get back into the right one.

MRS. ALLEN

[*She rises and begins to speak reluctantly, but gathers force as she goes on.*] I can't believe people are bad. My dressmaking takes me where I can watch them live. They don't talk very much about God, but with them nothing matters beyond the great commandment, "Love thy neighbour as thyself." And when people are living that commandment all the talking and shouting in the world wouldn't help. And a whole lot of 'em are fighting all kinds of things that pull 'em down and are doing the very best they can. Oh, I know, people are good and the world's getting better every minute for their living in it.

[*Stands with shining eyes forgetting their antagonism to her opinion.*

WARREN

D'you mean the world is better fer people that get along without tending on the means of grace?

MRS. ALLEN

[*Startled at the aggression of his tone.*] Why, yes, I mean what we consider important maybe the Lord won't take into account if people only live up to that commandment.

WARREN

You're on unsafe ground. The devil argues that worldly way.

MRS. ALLEN

Oh no! I think—

PREACHER

Sister Allen, I regret you are wandering away from the church. I'll come to you to-morrow and wrestle with you. You need help back into the way. [*When he has addressed her, she sits down, disappointed but not beaten. He turns to the others.*] We must approach the new year penitently and prayerfully.

WARREN

Amen. Amen.

PREACHER

There are but a few minutes in the old year. We will complete the watch together in medita-

tion and silent prayer. Pray forgiveness of sin, bringing the erring to a true understanding, increase to our number, and the returning of the wandering to the faith. [*All look at* MRS. ALLEN.] Let the wandering pray to be guided back into the path of right.

[*He kneels at the table and the congregation settle to their worship.*

WARREN

[*Having turned round and knelt.*] Oh God. Oh God. Have mercy.

[*Silence of some length once or twice broken by a bit of individual prayer spoken indistinctly.*

[*The door at the right swings slowly toward audience—stops—opens farther until it comes to a creak in the hinge. The woman who sits farthest from the stove draws her shawl more closely. The* PREACHER *looks up, but is unable to see any one.*

[*A timid voice from the unseen woman in the door.*] Can I come in?

PREACHER

[*All turn.*] All are welcome before the Lord.

[*A young woman enters staggering under the weight of a five year old child. Her inadequate dress has the mark of the cheap urban castaway in contrast to the village women's smugness. She is unmistakably weak from hunger and exposure. Throughout, her sweetness of manner appeals and saves from burlesque her misunderstanding of the preacher's metaphysical figure. She stops near the door uncertain.*

PREACHER

Come in. All are welcome before the Lord.

YOUNG WOMAN

[*Moving along the aisle.*] You Mr. Lord?

PREACHER

Don't you know the Lord, Jesus Christ?

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh! Didn't know your name 'tall. 'Scuse me. [*She shivers.*] Ain't a saloon open.

[*The women gasp.*

STONE

You won't go to the saloon, here, hussy.

YOUNG WOMAN

[*Sweetly and timidly.*] My name ain't hussy; but Lizzie.

STONE

Hùmph!

PREACHER

Well, Lizzie, you do very wrong to go to the saloon, when you might come to the worship of the Lord.

LIZZIE

No, sir. 'Tain't wrong to go to a saloon; it's warm there.

MRS. BARNS

Why! Why!

MRS. ROUNDTREE

Mercy!

MATTIE BLACK

What talk!

STONE

Put her out. I'll give her a place at the lock-up where she'll keep warm until she knows where to keep out of.

PREACHER

Patience, Brother Stone! She may have been sent here to have her soul redeemed.

WARREN

Amen.

STONE

Doubt it. Know that loose kind.

LIZZIE

No, sir. I weren't sent here 'tall. I'm hunting my man. [*Sinks into a chair.*

MRS. ALLEN

Poor thing.

LIZZIE

[*Gathers all her strength to make her appeal.*] Yo' see I'm from the city, and he lived out in the country somewheres. D' you think I'll find him?

STONE

Crazy.

PREACHER

[*Answering directly in spite of himself.*] The country is large.

LIZZIE

I kno't. I'm all done out carrying David. He's getting so heavy.

WARREN

Convert her, Brother.

LIZZIE

[*Rousing.*] 'Tain't wrong to go to the saloon; it's warm there an' mebbe they'd gimme something to eat.

PREACHER

[*Sternly rushing at the opening.*] Do you live by bread alone?

WARREN

Amen. Be instant in season.

LIZZIE

Oh no, sir. Sometimes I wash dishes at a hotel, an' I get meat—[*proudly*] left-overs, you know.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Who has been trying to control herself during the last few speeches.*] But entirely out of season now. Mattie, let me out.

[*Pushes into the aisle.*

STONE

Better let her alone. Take my opinion for it.

MATTIE BLACK

[*Catching at* MRS. ALLEN'S *dress.*] You know the kind of women that go to the saloon.

MRS. ALLEN

Yes. The women who can't find Christian charity and love anywhere else.

MATTIE BLACK

Oh!

MRS. ALLEN

[*Peeping at the child as women will.*] Why, the boy is asleep.

LIZZIE

Yes'm.

MRS. ALLEN

How old is he?

LIZZIE

Five last summer.

MRS. ALLEN

He isn't very big for his age.

LIZZIE

No'm. But he's awful heavy to carry.

MRS. ALLEN

He's a fine little chap though.

LIZZIE

Yes'm. Like his paw.

[*The* PREACHER *goes and talks to* STONE.

MRS. ALLEN

You thought your husband came out here?

LIZZIE

Yes'm, he come from the country, but you'd never know'd it to see him. Didn't like it, though I guess his folks was real swell.

MRS. ALLEN

And you don't know what became of him?

LIZZIE

No'm. Yo' see Davie was born at the Charity. An' I al'ays thought he went back to his folks. I ken tell you he was a looker. D' you think I ken find 'im? [*Sinks back faint.*

MRS. ALLEN

We'll see, dear.

LIZZIE

[*Starting up nervously.*] And yo' don't think I'm a bad un for going to a saloon?

MRS. ALLEN

No, dear. I do not.

MATTIE BLACK

Hannah Allen, for shame.

LIZZIE

I ain't.

[*She closes her eyes and her head sinks.*

MRS. ALLEN

No, I know, Lizzie. Let me put David here under the preacher's coat.

[*Takes the child, and* LIZZIE *settles to unconsciousness.*

MATTIE BLACK

Speaking plainly as a friend, after all we know your boy brought on you through the saloon, I'd think you'd be the last one to defend it.

MRS. ALLEN

I am. But will you tell me what my son has to do with this woman?

MATTIE BLACK

Nothing, far as I know.

MRS. ALLEN

Then, we won't talk about him.

[*Puts the child down.*

PREACHER

[*Leaving* STONE.] Sister Allen, if this young woman goes out of the world and her soul is lost through your interfering, God will hold you to account in the last day.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Straightening up to face him.*] Funny, I was thinking of the last day. And then I'll be with the saloon keeper—

PREACHER

I fear you will.

MRS. ALLEN

I'll be with the saloonkeeper who "fed her when she was anhungered." [*Change of manner to putting the thing up to him.*] If you and the saloonkeeper are judged by this, where will you be?

PREACHER

I'm doing my duty; she needs salvation.

MRS. ALLEN

She needs something to eat and to be got to bed, if you people will go away.

PREACHER

Sister Allen, do you know what you are saying?

MRS. ALLEN

Of course, why, she's worried nearly crazy over her husband deserting her, and all worn out and starving and nearly frozen walking— And you —you fools—are tormenting her about her soul.

PREACHER

Her soul ought to be saved.

[WARREN, STONE, *and* MATTIE *speak in response to* PREACHER.

WARREN

Amen.

STONE

What you got to say to that?

MATTIE BLACK

Amen.

MRS. ALLEN

Why can't you see? The poor little drudge's

been worked to death ever since she was a baby and never's had any time to have a soul.

PREACHER

May God have mercy on you.

MRS. BARNS

Oh!

MATTIE BLACK

No!

MRS. ROUNDTREE

Mercy.

MRS. ALLEN

Of course, you wouldn't understand. Won't you go away and let me get her to bed?

PREACHER

I will stay to redeem her soul.

MRS. ALLEN

Oh, for a saloonkeeper!

[*She stands a minute thinking, then goes resolutely to the bureau rear centre, takes up a box of tea and the cruet of the communion service. The* PREACHER *and the people watch her hypnotized. She goes to the stove and rinses the cruet with boiling water from the kettle.*

PREACHER

What are you doing with the vessels of communion?

MRS. ALLEN

Doing? That's the point. [*Then rinsing the cruet.*] Something must be done.

[*She opens the box and takes tea in her fingers.*

MATTIE BLACK

[*As the tea drops.*] Tea!

PREACHER

You shan't give *her* tea out of the chalice. [*Steps forward toward her.* MRS. ALLEN *unanswering pours the water over the tea. After a pause.*] You don't intend to do it?

MRS. ALLEN

Why yes, I do.

PREACHER

I won't let you. [MRS. ALLEN *looks at the cruet while waiting for the tea. Another pause.*] I won't let you. Do you hear?

MRS. ALLEN

Perfectly.

PREACHER

[*Screaming.*] Do you know what you are doing?

MRS. ALLEN

I am trying to keep my temper.

PREACHER

It's sacrilege—sacrilege.

[MRS. ALLEN *picks up the cruet in a holder.* STONE *and* WARREN *speak, almost at once to egg the* PREACHER *on.*

STONE

You must deal with her.

WARREN

Amen.

PREACHER

[*Snatching at the spout.*] I'll stop you.

MRS. ALLEN

Be careful. You will burn your hands. [*He draws back his burned hand and storms rear; she pours the tea.*] The wrath of the tea pot.

PREACHER

God, may thy wrath not fall on me.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Going to* LIZZIE.] Here, my dear.

LIZZIE

[*Rousing.*] Awww— Oh, I must 've dropped off. D' you think I ken find 'im?

MRS. ALLEN

We'll see. Here. Drink this—

PREACHER

Blasphemy. The communion service. Blasphemy.

MRS. ALLEN

Well then that too. Drink this in memory of Him Who came to bring love to men.

[*Her eyes blaze at the preacher.*

[PREACHER, STONE, *and* WARREN *speak almost at once. The orchestration of these speeches is almost a groan.*

PREACHER

God be merciful!

WARREN

Oh God!

STONE

She's gone beyond our prayers.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Putting the cover on the box and giving* LIZZIE *bread from the table.*] That will put strength into you, won't it, dear?

LIZZIE

Yes'm [*Raising the chalice into the view of all.*] Gee! Ain't it a pretty cup! [STONE *rises angrily.*] D' you know, I dreamt I pretty near found him? Don't you believe I ken?

[*The congregation is getting to its feet and preparing to leave.*

MRS. ALLEN

We have broken up the meeting. Drink it all.

MATTIE BLACK

Hannah Allen, this will come back on you.

MRS. ALLEN

I shall reap what I sow.

[*She leads* LIZZIE *to the bedroom.*

[*The* PREACHER, *with the basket, and* STONE *storm out;* BARNS *and his wife follow.* MATTIE BLACK, MRS. ROUNDTREE, *and* ELLA DOW *are seated putting on their overshoes; they stop and watch* WARREN.

*He rises. All the religious fire is gone. His movements are heavy with sorrow. He puts on his cap and shuffles along the aisle to the door. They are held by the broken old man, but cannot interpret what they see.* ELLA *is the first to come back to the present; she looks at the disorder of the door.*

ELLA

I think I ought to stay and tidy up.

MATTIE BLACK

Well, then, I'm not going—I don't think we ought to leave that girl with Hannah. How are we to know how anything turns out? She might want Christian comfort. [*Takes off her overshoes.*] I want to know how that girl dies.

MRS. ROUNDTREE

[*Timidly.*] I'm not going home alone.

MATTIE BLACK

I'll see the thing out. This chair belongs in the kitchen.

[*They move about carrying off some of the chairs and rearranging furniture, and* MAT-

TIE *slams the hymn books together.* MRS. ALLEN *enters from the bedroom.*

MRS. ALLEN

Thank you. You know where my chairs belong. Ella, will you go and get a doctor here?

MATTIE BLACK

Who's goin' to pay for *him*, I'd like to know?

[MRS. ALLEN *smiles; goes to the bureau, takes a night gown from a drawer, hangs it over the back of a chair near the stove.* ELLA *goes out.* MRS. ALLEN *takes the sleeping* DAVID *from the chair near the stove, puts him on the lounge and covers him.*

MRS. ALLEN

Poor little fellow, you ought to be undressed but I can't tend to you now.

MATTIE BLACK

He ain't likely to have a ma long.

MRS. ALLEN

No, she's pretty far gone.

MATTIE BLACK

Think she'll live through the night?

MRS. ALLEN

Hard telling. She's weak as a cat, but not willing to give up her hunt and go to bed.

[*Exit taking a chair with her.*

MATTIE BLACK

[*Who has watched* MRS. ALLEN *off.*] She don't act a bit repentant.

MRS. ROUNDTREE

The way she talked made the cold shivers run up and down my back.

[*Enters* ELLA.

MATTIE BLACK

[ELLA *has gone to the night gown and is warming different parts of it.*] Pretty far gone?

ELLA

Starved to the bone.

MATTIE BLACK

Did she ask for spirit'al help?

ELLA

No. She babbled on about her man. Hannah's getting her quiet.

MATTIE BLACK

[*After a moment of silence.*] She'll be taking up with evolution next.

MRS. ROUNDTREE

Mercy, I hope not.

[MRS. ALLEN *enters from the bedroom with a lamp which she places on the bureau and turns down.*

MRS. ALLEN

[*In answer to* MATTIE BLACK'S *evident question.*] Maybe, she will sleep.

MATTIE BLACK

[*Taking up a pile of hymn books.*] Where do you want them put?

MRS. ALLEN

[*Hesitates a moment; her face becomes cold; then indicating the table.*] On the table.

MATTIE BLACK

Ain't you going to put them away?

MRS. ALLEN

No. The preacher can take them away as he took the communion service.

MATTIE BLACK

Well, but—

MRS. ALLEN

[*Firmly.*] From now on, my religion will have to be without the paraphernalia of the church.

MATTIE BLACK

[*Vehemently.*] You ain't goin' to leave the church!

MRS. ALLEN

[*Struggling and gasping.*] Yes.

[*There is a sound of falling wood off stage.*

MRS. ROUNDTREE

What was that?

MRS. ALLEN

The wood.

MATTIE BLACK

[*Dropping the books.*] I'll see.

MRS. ALLEN

No, I thank you, I can go. You have done a good deal. Sit down and watch David.

[*She takes the lamp from the bureau and*

*goes into the wood room. Just as she is leaving,* ELLA *enters.*

ELLA

Neither doctor's home. I left word—

MRS. ALLEN

Watch them. I mean watch David.

[*She goes out.*

MATTIE BLACK

I don't see what's got into Hannah Allen.

[*She sits near the lounge.*

MRS. ROUNDTREE

I al'ays thought of her as well grounded in the faith.

MATTIE BLACK

Ella, what do you think? Hannah Allen said that she was going to wash her hands of religion.

ELLA

[*Incredulously.*] No, she couldn't have said that.

MATTIE BLACK

Yes, she did, right here not two minutes ago. Didn't she, Miz Roundtree?

MRS. ROUNDTREE

Not exactly that. She said—

[*Moves away to a straight chair near the centre of the room.*

MATTIE BLACK

Donno what else you could make of it. Donno what she means by getting out with the church anyhow.

MRS. ROUNDTREE

It'll be a blow to the church to lose her, we got to admit that. She was such a good worker.

ELLA

D' you think she'll leave the church?

MRS. ROUNDTREE

I don't see how she can stay in.

MATTIE BLACK

[*After the manner of gossip's analysis.*] Yes. She was al'ays a good worker, but I wouldn't wonder if the church would get along without people that want to leave. An' I donno as the church wants them that talks her way.

ELLA

They'd miss her help.

MATTIE BLACK

One'd think the way her boy went to hell would be a warning to her.

MRS. ROUNDTREE

I don't believe she even knows where he is.

MATTIE BLACK

[*She is very positive here.*] Just tramping, I hear. He's nothing but a common tramp.

ELLA

[*She hardly says this to the others.*] Too bad. He was a nice looking boy.

MATTIE BLACK

I guess Marshal Stone'd like to get a nice look at him. But d' you know I never hear the marshal talking about enforcing the law but I have to think of the cute way that young scapegrace, Allen, fooled Stone and got away.

MRS. ROUNDTREE

Marshal Stone told Roundtree he'd never let him go if he got his hands on him again.

ELLA

Young Allen will go to prison for a long time if he gets caught.

MATTIE BLACK

No longer than he deserves. [*Her tone and manner of the professional gossip reverse the force of the word "sorry."*] I al'ays did feel sorry for Hannah though, until I heard the way she talked and carried on to-night.

MRS. ROUNDTREE

Her talk gave me hot flashes and cold chills all over together.

MATTIE BLACK

I wonder what's become of her.

ELLA

Where'd she go?

MATTIE BLACK

Went to find something that fell in the wood room.

MRS. ROUNDTREE

Well, I'd think she'd have found it by now.

MATTIE BLACK

[*Losing interest.*] Well, as I was saying, I don't believe she'll make a very good job trying to get along without the support of the church.

[*A rattle of the door knob.*

MATTIE BLACK

Mercy, Miz Roundtree, what was you saying?

[MRS. ALLEN *enters white and much shaken.*

MRS. ROUNDTREE

[*After a moment's stare.*] Did you find what fell?

MRS. ALLEN

[*Trying to ignore the question and failing.*] I want to thank you all for your help. I don't think there's anything more to do now, and you are all tired.

MRS. ROUNDTREE

I was thinking of going when you got back.

[*Rises.*

MATTIE BLACK

Yes, I must be going, now't you're here; but what was the noise in the wood room that took you so long to find out about?

MRS. ALLEN

[*Confused.*] Oh, that? Why—the cat was climbing on the wood.

[*Suspicion gathers in the faces of* MATTIE *and* MRS ROUNDTREE.

MATTIE

The cat! Made a noise like that? What you talkin', Hannah Allen?

MRS. ALLEN

[*After a pause.*] The wood must've just fallen. I was hunting for the cat.

MATTIE BLACK

[*Snatching her shawl from a chair.*] I don't b'lieve a word of it, Hannah Allen. You got into a queer way lately. Are you coming?

[MATTIE *and* MRS. ROUNDTREE *with set faces are now near the door.*

ELLA

[*Softly.*] Good-night. I'm sorry.

[*She follows the others out.*

MATTIE BLACK

[*To* ELLA *and* MRS. ROUNDTREE *as they go.*] Think I know a lie.

[MRS. ALLEN *moves to the door and locks it after them, pulls down the shades of the windows, then goes back to the wood room door and opens it.*

MRS. ALLEN

[*Collecting herself.*] Come in. [*Enters her son,* PHILOS; *he answers* MATTIE'S *description "Nothing but a common tramp," except that his over intelligent face marks him anything but common. She catches convulsively at him.*] Oh, my boy!

PHILOS

[*Flippantly as he moves away from her caress.*] You better take a correspondence course in lying; your tech's poor.

MRS. ALLEN

Yes. I had a limited education.

PHILOS

Sorry can't stay long. But I got to blow before the old hens cackle it about that I'm here.

MRS. ALLEN

You can't go without something to eat.

PHILOS

Thank you, lady. I never let an impulse of charity go to waste. [MRS. ALLEN *goes toward the kitchen.*] My life work is to develop charity in the public.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Turning back.*] Every night I think of how hard everything is for you.

PHILOS

[*Cheerfully.*] The world's dead ag'in me and my kind.

MRS. ALLEN

I think of you without enough to eat and drink.

PHILOS

[*Laughing but not unkindly.*] I'm a philosopher. They call me Philos. There's plenty of fool women to fill our bellies with eating; so that's all right. And there never was yet a man that could get enough to drink.

MRS. ALLEN

But sleeping out in the cold.

PHILOS

Lords of the road sleeping in the cold! Dead wrong again. While the good and industrious stay at home and freeze, we go to our winter homes in the sunny South.

MRS. ALLEN

But—but—

PHILOS

Now see here. Don't take it that way. I've done things you're ashamed of before and after I left here. Why waste feeling over me? I'm an outcast. I'm not worth it. But don't think I get no enjoyment out of life on the road.

MRS. ALLEN

Do you keep well?

PHILOS

As I hinted about drink—fine as a pickle with a little pickling. I got to get out of here. Don't be long about that lunch. [*Warms himself at the stove and later moves to the table.*] What was that gang here for? Cottage prayer meeting?

MRS. ALLEN

[*Moving about in the kitchen.*] That to begin with; then a poor girl stumbled in; we have her in bed in my room there. She'll drift off into eternity some time to-night.

PHILOS

How'd she come here?

MRS. ALLEN

Wandered in hunting for her husband.

PHILOS

He wasn't the apron string variety.

MRS. ALLEN

Deserted when the baby was born.

PHILOS

[*With a shrug.*] Many a man deserted, because he couldn't keep step in the regular army.

MRS. ALLEN

Oh, I believe she was better off without him.

PHILOS

[*Goes to the bureau.*] The deserter often knows that.

[*He takes the lamp from the bureau and goes into the bedroom.*

MRS. ALLEN

He left her with the child to support. He was a hero.

[*She goes to* DAVID, *and adjusts his covering.* PHILOS *comes from the bedroom.*

PHILOS

[*Softly.*] I'll be damned.

MRS. ALLEN

What did you say?

PHILOS

How'd Lizzie come here?

MRS. ALLEN

I didn't hear what you said.

PHILOS

How'd she come here?

MRS. ALLEN

Hunting for her husband and she wandered in here ready to die. [*Returns to the kitchen.*] Babbled all the time about finding him—I don't think she was herself, because she didn't seem to know more'n her name, Lizzie,—and David.

PHILOS

What?

MRS. ALLEN

David, her little boy.

PHILOS

Oh, I see. [*Softly.*] Her little boy.

MRS. ALLEN

He isn't very big for his age; don't s'pose he ever had enough to eat.

PHILOS

[*Goes slowly to the lounge, stands looking at* DAVID.] Well, little rooster. [*Back to his careless manner.*] Chickens come home to roost.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Coming from the kitchen hunts for something on the bureau.*] I'll always want to know David's last name.

PHILOS

[*Moving away from* DAVID *and avoiding* MRS. ALLEN.] You'll never find out his father.

MRS. ALLEN

There's no way to find out.

PHILOS

No. No way. You'll never know.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Produces money from a dish on the bureau.*] Here. [*Goes to him.*] A little late for Christmas.

PHILOS

[*Turns, looks dully at the money, then drops to flippancy.*] Can't be done. Not this time. You have more need for that than my kind. I

was telling you we are different. [*Turns as if drawn back to* DAVID.] You pay. [*Looking at* DAVID.] You see you pay.

[*The tableau is held for a moment. A commanding knock on the door sends* PHILOS *flying to the wood room door.*

PHILOS

I'll catch the freight at the crossing. Keep them busy.

[MRS. ALLEN *nods and follows him into the kitchen. The knock is repeated more emphatically.*

MRS. ALLEN

Who are you? [*She moves down to the rocking chair in front of the stove and sets it rocking violently.*

STONE

[*Without.*] Open the door!

MRS. ALLEN

Not until I know who you are.

STONE

Open the door, or I'll break it in!

MRS. ALLEN

[*Crossing.*] Who are you, and what do you want at this time of night?

STONE

I am the marshal of the town, and I have a right to come in at any time of the night.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Opening the door with caution.*] Oh, come in. I live so near the street that drunken fellows try the door often. [STONE *enters carrying a lantern.*] I didn't know you had to be out so late.

STONE

Humph! Agreeable, ain't you?

[*He looks hurriedly into the wood room, the kitchen, the bedroom. Crosses and meets* MRS. ALLEN *about the centre of the room.*

MRS. ALLEN

Can you tell me what you want?

STONE

[*Giving her a scornful glance crosses to windows and throws up the shades.*] Honest people ain't ashamed to have a shade up, are they?

MRS. ALLEN

If you ask me, I'd say "No."

STONE

Hannah Allen, where have you got that boy of yours hid?

[MRS. ALLEN *looks up at* STONE, *her lips move but utter no word; she hangs her head and turns away.* STONE *studies her a moment.*

STONE

You know my duty to the law.

MRS. ALLEN

[*In a voice almost inaudible for her agitation.*] Yes.

STONE

I got to search your house.

MRS. ALLEN

I know.

STONE

Take the lamp. [*She moves to the bureau slowly and reluctantly turns the lamp up and leads the way to the bedroom.*] That girl alive yet?

[*He passes in; she stays in the living room holding the lamp.*

MRS. ALLEN

Sleeping.

STONE

Lower the light.

MRS. ALLEN

Yes.

STONE

[*Enters and leads the way to the wood room door and goes in. Returning.*] Nobody there now.

MRS. ALLEN

[*With effort.*] A little cold for a spare room, don't you think?

STONE

Humph! [*Goes to the kitchen. Speaking within.*] Going to have something to eat?

MRS. ALLEN

Yes.

STONE

[*Returning.*] 'Tain't for more'n one anyhow.

MRS. ALLEN

No.

[STONE *opens the stair door.*

STONE

Upstairs?

MRS. ALLEN

Yes.

[*They go upstairs.*

MATTIE BLACK

[*Enters, looks around the room.*] Nobody here. [*Hears* STONE *and* MRS. ALLEN *above.*] Oh. [*Crosses and peeks into the bedroom.*] Breathing, yet. [*Goes to her overshoes near the stove; picks them up.*] No, I'll leave 'em and I ken come back again. [*Drops the overshoes, listens.*] Here they come.

[*Crosses to the outer door and is passing out when* STONE *and* MRS. ALLEN *return.*

STONE

There he goes. [*Rushes after.*] Halt or I'll shoot.

[STONE *returns with* MATTIE BLACK *by the collar.*

MATTIE BLACK

Don't you know who I am yet?

STONE

What're you prowling into people's houses for?

MRS. ALLEN

Oh, Mattie, I thought you went home.

MATTIE BLACK

I came back after my overshoes.

MRS. ALLEN

Did you leave them?

STONE

[*To* MATTIE.] He ain't here.

MATTIE BLACK

He was here. I know it.

STONE

[*With slow sarcasm.*] Did you talk with him?

MATTIE BLACK

I don't have to be told everything.

STONE

He ain't here now. I looked all over.

MATTIE BLACK

I know another thing—Hannah's be'n making a ninny of you. He got away while she kept you here.

STONE

Hannah, would you do that?

[*A locomotive whistle is heard.*

MRS. ALLEN

[*Her control giving away.*] That, too, for love. Oh, but he got away.

STONE

Hannah, you were a Christian once.

MRS. ALLEN

And a mother above all.

MATTIE BLACK

[*Excitedly.*] Maybe, you ken catch him yet!

STONE

The beggar!

[STONE *and* MATTIE *exeunt.*

[MRS. ALLEN *goes to* DAVID *and tucks the cover more closely, goes to the bureau, takes the lamp, enters the bedroom, comes back almost immediately, places the lamp*

*on the bureau, brings wood from the wood room, puts it in the stove, goes into the kitchen.*

ELLA

[*Entering breathless.*] Hannah! Hannah!

MRS. ALLEN

[*Coming from the kitchen.*] Why, Ella! What is it?

ELLA

Mattie's gone to tell the marshal about—about —she thought you were talking to—somebody in the wood room.

MRS. ALLEN

I know what she thought.

ELLA

I run back through the vacant lot to tell you, and there I come on a man on all fours terrible hurt.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Dazed, passed her hand over her eyes.*] You mean—

ELLA

Yes. He tried to climb on the train at the crossin'. An' he fell off.

MRS. ALLEN

Oh— [*She catches a shawl from a nail on a door, and throws it over her head.*] We can go through the back way.

[ELLA *follows* MRS. ALLEN *through the kitchen whose door is heard closing. The room is empty for a few seconds; then* MATTIE'S *face is seen at the window.*

MATTIE BLACK

[*Entering.*] Hannah! [*She crosses to the bedroom, goes in and reappears immediately, looks into the kitchen.*] No, she ain't here. He ain't far. [*Runs outside again.*

[MRS. ALLEN *and* ELLA *are heard helping* PHILOS *into the kitchen.* MRS. ALLEN *enters from the kitchen; gathers* DAVID *up from the lounge, crosses, turns the chair facing the stove and puts him in it, then moves the lounge to the centre of the room nearer the stove, goes back to wood room.* MRS. ALLEN *and* ELLA *support* PHILOS *and help him to the lounge.*

PHILOS

Thank you. [*Sinks on the lounge.*

ELLA

[*To* MRS. ALLEN.] The doctor'll be here for Lizzie.

[MRS. ALLEN *is putting a quilt over* PHILOS.

PHILOS

No, I'm past help. I've seen many a fellow die; my time has come.

MRS. ALLEN

Oh. my boy.

[MRS. ALLEN *and* ELLA *take off his shoes.*

PHILOS

Don't, mother. Pretty rough on you, but everybody'll be better off without me.

STONE

[*Bolting in.*] Mattie knew!

PHILOS

Miss Black would know.

STONE

[*Fumbling in his pocket.*] I will read the warrant for your arrest, Philos Allen.

PHILOS

Don't trouble; I know about it.

MRS. ALLEN

[*To* STONE.] Do you have to stay?

STONE

Unless I take him to jail.

MRS. ALLEN

But he's dying.

PHILOS

Don't say it so; I'm happy about it.

STONE

Got no proper feelings 'tall.

MRS. ALLEN

[*To* STONE.] I want him to myself here at home.

STONE

I swore he would never get away from me again. I won't chance his tricks.

MRS. ALLEN

But he's dying.

STONE

He belongs in jail.

MRS. ALLEN

Where do you belong? [*She tries to control*

*herself.*] Oh—I—Excuse me. But now it's different.

[*Almost overcome by her agitation she paces the floor back of* PHILOS.

STONE

I know my duty.

MRS. ALLEN

I ought not to have asked.

PHILOS

Stay as long as you like. I won't keep you long.

STONE

I will keep you as long as you live.

PHILOS

You're hospitable, Stone. I like you.

STONE

Don't want your liking. Don't want to hear about it.

PHILOS

Not an enemy?

STONE

[*Proudly.*] I am an enemy of all wrong doing.

PHILOS

I've forgiven my enemies.

STONE

Do you mean I am to learn from you?

PHILOS

I've learned from many.

STONE

Humph! [*Sits doggedly at the table.*

MATTIE BLACK

[*Enters.*] You caught him!

PHILOS

"I was in prison and ye visited me."

STONE

[*Starting from his chair.*] No blasphemy, d' you hear?

PHILOS

I was only giving her a tip about the password at heaven's gate.

MATTIE BLACK

You're paying pretty dear for what you've done.

PHILOS

Oh, no. I never paid for anything in my life.

ELLA

You aren't comfortable that way.

PHILOS

[*Kindly to her.*] Won't matter long.

ELLA

I'll get a pillow. Lizzie don't need 'em both.
[*Exit* ELLA.

MATTIE BLACK

[*Her manner and words contradicting each other.*] I am sorry for you.

PHILOS

I return the compliment.

MATTIE BLACK

You pay pretty heavy for your sin.

PHILOS

Oh, no. Marshal Stone here, calls on me to make good for my wrongdoing. I die and get out of it.

MATTIE BLACK

We know sin is death; but a life is a good deal to pay for sin.

PHILOS

You are wrong. You never learned the banking business of life. The value of a life can be reckoned by the debts that other people owe to it. We all owe mother. I never made anything of my talents. No one owes anything to me. I owe everybody. I forfeit a worthless thing for my wrongdoing. Why! A life is worth exactly what you make it.

STONE

Humph!

MATTIE BLACK

What nonsense!

[*Re-enters* ELLA *with pillow, goes to* PHILOS, *puts it under his head.*

PHILOS

One name for philosophy.

MATTIE BLACK

I donno whether 'tis or not. I told you were here, because I thought it was my duty.

PHILOS

That's all right, Miss Black. Don't apologise.

MATTIE BLACK

I don't apologise for doing my duty.

PHILOS

When we want to do a thing, we call it *duty*. Duty was ever my guiding star.

MATTIE BLACK

Flighty; what an awful thing when the wicked come down to punishment.

ELLA

[*Rearranging the pillows.*] Is that better?

PHILOS

Thanks.

MATTIE BLACK

[*Making for the door.*] I'll get the preacher.

PHILOS

Don't.

MATTIE BLACK

I don't know what you mean.

PHILOS

Must he come? Mother?

MRS. ALLEN

[*Controlling herself.*] It is the custom. I suppose he feels it his duty. Oh, yes, let him come.

STONE

It's his duty to save souls.

ELLA

Can't I wash you a little?

PHILOS

Will you?

[*Exit* ELLA *to the kitchen.*

STONE

Aren't you afraid to die?

PHILOS

No more than to live.

STONE

Hardened to sin.

[ELLA *returns from the kitchen with a basin, cloth, and towel and washes* PHILOS's *hands.*

[MRS. ALLEN, *who has been pacing the floor, sits in the chair before* PHILOS, *takes the cloth from* ELLA *and washes his face.*

PHILOS

And all my wrongdoing comes on you. You

have paid already and you will have to pay still more.

[*Enter* MATTIE BLACK *and the* PREACHER.

[MRS. ALLEN *turns and sees the* PREACHER. *Repugnance comes over her. She rises and moves that when the* PREACHER *comes to* PHILOS, *he will not be near her.*

PREACHER

[*To* PHILOS.] I come to offer you the comfort of the church. I hear you are dying.

PHILOS

Is that the most comfort you can offer?

[MRS. ALLEN *still has some faith in the mysteries of the church. She restrains her impulse to defend her son. She withdraws to give the* PREACHER *a chance to redeem the soul of the dying man although she despises the agent. She goes to the rocking chair near the stove and picking up* DAVID, *sits with her back to the audience. She rocks more or less violently according to her agitation.*

PREACHER

I call upon you to repent.

PHILOS

What good will it do?

[ELLA *carries away the basin to the kitchen.* MATTIE BLACK *moves to a seat.*

PREACHER

Don't you want to enter the kingdom of heaven?

PHILOS

You offer to get me into heaven?

PREACHER

Repent and be saved.

PHILOS

Do you teach that?

PREACHER

I teach the truth. [*Pause.*] You are nearing the river; these are nearly your last moments on earth. Your New Year's dawn will be in another world. Which shall it be: the world of continual misery, the world of perpetual torture, the world of endless fire, Hell; or shall it be the world of good, the world of everlasting joy, the world where never ending pæans are sung, the world—heaven?

PHILOS

All I have to do is to repent?

PREACHER

That is all. Repent and come nearer to God.

PHILOS

Is that all!

[*Silence.*

PREACHER

[*Solemnly.*] Over on the other shore of the river you are to cross are some who are dear to you.

PHILOS

You are an advocate of heaven?

PREACHER

Well—

[MATTIE *and* STONE *have not caught the scorn in the epithet.* STONE *rubs his hands anticipatingly.* MATTIE *nods her approval.*

PHILOS

A lawyer in the Court of the Lord.

PREACHER

[*Visibly swelling at a supposed compliment.*] The name is altogether appropriate.

PHILOS

Do you know what I call your method of salvation?

PREACHER

The name is unimportant when a soul is redeemed.

PHILOS

[*More vigorously and in unmistakable tones.*] I call it spiritual bankruptcy.

STONE

[*To* PHILOS.] No blasphemy, d' you hear?

PREACHER

He isn't rational.

PHILOS

No, I'm telling the truth.

STONE

[*To the* PREACHER.] He ain't so delirious as you think. [*Standing over* PHILOS.] You stop making light of religious things.

[*Retreats to his chair at the table.*

PHILOS

I am the only one that is not making religion ridiculous. I broke my mother's heart. I de-

serted my wife. I sinned every sin—pretty near, and the talents that were born in me I made over into bad. Now I'm dying.

PREACHER

Your sin will meet its punishment, if you do not repent.

PHILOS

[*His breath has given out for a moment and his eyes close, but he rallies his strength and struggles on.*] Now you come to me and offer to have my sins struck off the books—to let me off without punishment. Would repentance undo my waste and my wrongdoing? Would it bring back the girl I sent crazy to death? Would it take one scar off my mother's heart for the sorrow I brought on her, would it make my little boy's life any easier? Why! If there is a lake that burneth, I belong there. What you offer is nothing but sneaking me of my spiritual debts—nothing but spiritual bankruptcy. I've got to pay. And I will pay. [*Sinks back.*

MRS. ALLEN

[*Who has risen with* DAVID *in her arms crosses to the chair before the lounge.*] Do you mean that?

PHILOS

[*Weakly.*] I knew you'd understand. I don't want to get to heaven on a crooked repentance. I want to pay my debts; I want to go to hell.

[*The* PREACHER *moves backward a step or two.* PHILOS *sinks back and lies motionless with his eyes closed.*

STONE

Brazen it out.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Sinking to the chair and letting* DAVID *slide to his feet between them.*] Oh, my honest boy!

PREACHER

Are you going to abet this prodigal in his blasphemy?

MRS. ALLEN

[*Rising.*] If it be blasphemy, I am.

PREACHER

One soul already to-night missed regeneration, because your mind was on things temporal; now you do this. You are as sinful as he. You will burn with him in hell.

MRS. ALLEN

Do you never look beyond a man's words to his meaning? If he had taken your bribe of heaven, he would have died a coward. His refusal is the repentance of a strong man. I glory in such a death.

PREACHER

The fires of hell will burn away your sinful thought.

MRS. ALLEN

Your efforts to-night have made redemption, heaven, and religion very cheap indeed. You tried to bully Lizzie, a poor thing that was too far gone to know what you were talking about, and now you attempt to terrorise a dying man with the fear of hell fire and bribe him with heaven. Do dying converts make the world any better to live in? Why don't you try to improve the living, the strong, who have life before them?

MATTIE BLACK

You talk shameful.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Sinking down.*] Oh. How can I dispute now?

PREACHER

[*With a downward fling of his hand strides off as if giving the final word.*] You are overcome in your blasphemy against the church by the presence of that innocent child.

MATTIE BLACK

We ought to have let Brother Stone take Lizzie and the boy to the lock-up as he wanted to; then she might have been redeemed.

STONE

[*Growling.*] The town will have to bury her anyhow.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Rising and facing them.*] It shall not.

STONE

How then?

MRS. ALLEN

I will do it.

PREACHER

Let the town do it.

STONE

Why not?

MATTIE BLACK

I'd like to know!

MRS. ALLEN

She came to me at the time of year when everybody ought to be happy. Oh, she was the stranger within my gate.

PREACHER

You aren't in a sound state of mind.

STONE

You're crazy, Hannah Allen.

MRS. ALLEN

Perhaps. But I am thinking of poor little David. He can't grow up here to find out the town buried his mother.

PREACHER

What hurt will it do? We've planned to give him to some Christian family.

MRS. ALLEN

I will bury her.

STONE

[*With slow sarcasm.*] An' who's going to bury you?

[MATTIE *shows her appreciation of his humour with a harsh laugh.*

MRS. ALLEN

[*Quick to parry his thrust with sweetness and trust in her reply.*] No one for a long time yet. I am going to live, because work has been put into my hands to do. Part of Lizzie will live.

MATTIE BLACK

[*Warning a friend of a fault.*] Don't blaspheme again, Hannah.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Quietly.*] Part of Lizzie will live.

PREACHER

*Our* faith tells us that.

MRS. ALLEN

Part of her will live. [*Silence. Then she points to* DAVID.] There. There is part of her that will not die. Can't you understand?

STONE

What are you talking about?

MRS. ALLEN

I am talking about David.

STONE

What about David?

MRS. ALLEN

I will raise him.

PREACHER

You will raise him?

MATTIE BLACK

[*Impatiently.*] Hannah Allen! Raise a boy at your age.

PREACHER

No woman alone can raise a boy.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Losing her temper for a moment.*] I'll try. And if I spoil him,—I've seen many a man-raised boy that didn't turn out right.

STONE

He needs a man over him.

PREACHER

The boy must be raised in a Christian family.

MRS. ALLEN

One of you . . . ?

PREACHER

Let me find some Christian family. . . .

MRS. ALLEN

[*Sinking to her knees, and taking* DAVID *in her arms wildly. Her back is toward* PHILOS.] No. No, David. I won't let a Christian family have you.

PREACHER

Hopeless. [*Moving back to* STONE.] We'll have to take legal steps to put the child under proper custodial care.

STONE

Crazy, Hannah Allen. You're crazy.

MRS. ALLEN

Christ would understand.

[*After a silence,* PHILOS *puts out his hand and touches his mother's shoulder. She turns to him so that she,* DAVID *and* PHILOS *form a group.*

PHILOS

Do you want the boy, mother?

MRS. ALLEN

I want some one to work for—to live for.

MATTIE BLACK

She can't keep him. If he don't belong to anybody, he's the property of the state.

PHILOS

Come here, David.

[DAVID *does not move.*

MRS. ALLEN

Won't you go to the man?

PHILOS

Won't you come to me?

[DAVID *is unmoved.*

PREACHER

God gives children an instinct to tell good people. [*He comes forward and squats.*] Come here, Davie, Davie.

[DAVID *draws back a step to* PHILOS's *arm.*

PHILOS

You young rascal.

STONE

Mark my word. That boy will go to the devil.

PHILOS

I don't deny it. He has come to me already.

STONE

Humph!

[PHILOS *lying with his eyes closed gathers*

*strength to speak.* MRS. ALLEN *watches him.*

[*The window at the right is thrown up.*

[*A voice befuddled with drink.*] A tune for New Year's.

[*A dance played on a violin begins—the playing not of high quality.*

MATTIE BLACK

Who's that?

STONE

The drunk at his fiddle. I'll stop him.

[*Starts down to the window.* DAVID *with a transfigured look moves away from the lounge and is slowly drawn by the music.* PHILOS *rouses and follows him with his eyes.* MRS. ALLEN *rises slowly and spellbound watches David, the others gape at him.* PHILOS *holds up his hand in protest to* STONE. STONE *stops.* DAVID *moves almost to the window.*

STONE

[*Shouting.*] Stop it, stop it.

[*The dance ends suddenly in the middle of a phrase.* STONE *angrily flings* DAVID

*around and slams down the window;* MRS. ALLEN *rushes forward and snatches up* DAVID.

PHILOS

You couldn't let me have my last dance.

PREACHER

The fiddles play all the way to hell.

PHILOS

[*Hopefully.*] Is the way long?

PREACHER

It is the downward path and broad.

ELLA

I believe anything broad would seem dangerous to you.

PHILOS

Are those tears, little chicken? They are.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Getting him in her arms.*] Listen, David. I have a violin that used to belong to this man's papa. And I am going to let you make music on it. Won't that be nice?

PHILOS

I hope you will never be sorry for it.

STONE

Hannah Allen, are you going to give that boy lessons on the fiddle?

MRS. ALLEN

I am.

PREACHER

We, people of the church, cannot permit you to start that boy to hell.

MATTIE BLACK

We will see the law puts him under proper care.

MRS. ALLEN

You won't take David away from me!

PREACHER

We feel responsible for his soul.

MATTIE BLACK

He don't belong to anybody; so the state will look to it that he's took proper care of.

STONE

You can't fly in the face of the law the way you

fly in the face of the church. The law will humble you.

PHILOS

You are a pretty lot to call Christians.

STONE

Don't you begin to blaspheme again!

PHILOS

I want you to let my mother alone.

STONE

We know what we can do; we won't shrink our Christian duty for your commanding.

PHILOS

You can't be generous—any of you?

PREACHER

Duty determines our course. We are going to give this boy to a Christian family.

MATTIE BLACK

You can't argue us out of it.

PHILOS

I won't try. Mother, you may keep David.

MATTIE BLACK

What?

PHILOS

[*Having raised himself on his elbow turns his head slightly toward the door.*] Ask Lizzie. [*Raising his voice.*] Lizzie! Lizzie!

[*A silence.*

[LIZZIE, *in delirium, enters.*

LIZZIE

[*Passes her hand over her eyes.*] I—I dreamt I heard him.

PHILOS

You did, Lizzie.

LIZZIE

I heard him. I heard him.

PHILOS

Lizzie.

LIZZIE

[*Discovers him and rushes to him.*] My man!

[*She sinks down;* PHILOS *puts one arm around her and pushes* DAVID *into his mother's keeping.*

PHILOS

Mother, Lizzie and I want you to keep David.

MATTIE BLACK

Well, I never.

PHILOS

I wanted to give the boy a chance; I wanted his past to go no farther back than Lizzie. But I am his father.

STONE

His father?

MATTIE BLACK

You?

PREACHER

That accounts for much.

PHILOS

[*Bitterly to the Christians.*] Yes. You will make the little fellow live me down. [*To* DAVID *—his voice filled with sorrow at the injustice.*] Oh, my boy, they will make you pay.

MRS. ALLEN

[*Smiling through her tears at* DAVID.] Oh, David, you are mine, mine.

PHILOS

And, boy, don't make a mess of your life. In this world we have to pay our debts. If we don't,

somebody else must do it. Don't leave debts behind you like me.

MRS. ALLEN

Why, I have something to live for!

PHILOS

Oh, my boy, make yourself all that I might have been and lots more. [*Sinks back.*

PREACHER

A wasted life.

PHILOS

No, not a wasted life. What might have been good in us will live and have a chance in the boy.

MRS. ALLEN

Oh, he will more than make up.

MATTIE BLACK

We got that to see yet.

MRS. ALLEN

[*All her faith, hope, and will in her voice.*] You will see.

STONE

[*Sarcasm.*] We will.

CURTAIN

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Wisconsin plays.

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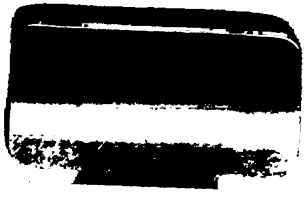
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